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The Relationship of the Self-esteem Variable to Specific Christian Doctrines

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A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

by
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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SELF-ESTEEM VARIABLE TO SPECIFIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

by

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

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Title: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SELF-ESTEEM VARIABLE TO SPECIFIC CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

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Problem

The self-esteem variable is often used as an evaluative criterion in the assessment of the functionality of particular Christian doctrines. High self-esteem is assumed to be the optimal level of self-functioning, and specific doctrines are evaluated according to this standard.

Purpose

It was the purpose of this study to examine the relationship between specific Christian doctrines and the self-esteem variable.

Method

The self-esteem variable was defined from selected psychological and theological literature. The literature was selected on the basis of two main criteria: a phenomenological approach and an identification of the self-esteem variable in terms of self-love, self-acceptance, and self-esteem. The self-esteem variable is examined in relationship to four major Christian doctrines: human nature, God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Conclusions

The assumption that high self-esteem is the optimal level of self-functioning is largely unsupported and highly tenuous. The major Christian doctrines examined provide a significant resource base for healthy self-esteem. These doctrines also provide a framework in which the cognitive-emotive inaccuracies of high and low self-esteem can be remediated.

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that the pastor must deal with psychological problems is universally recognized. In order to deal more effectively with the multitude of personality problems among church members pastors and Christian counselors rely on sound psychological concepts of human personality.

An area of particular interest is the self-esteem variable. It is generally recognized that self-esteem has great behavioral and motivational significance. Research has shown that low self-esteem is related to many other problems. In a Christian context low self-esteem is often viewed as a result of an overemphasis on human depravity and sin. For this reason Christian counselors and pastors are increasingly emphasizing biblical teachings that enhance self-esteem.

Although self-esteem language and literature abounds in the church, the issue is not altogether unambiguous. In fact, it is a highly controversial topic.

Problem

The relationship between the self-esteem variable and specific Christian doctrines is a significant and yet complex problem. Can the current pscyhological emphasis on positive self-esteem be harmonized with biblical teachings, particularly the doctrine of human nature?

Purpose

It is the purpose of this research to determine the relationship of particular biblical teachings to the self-esteem variable.

Significance

The self-esteem variable has been conceptualized differently in this research. High and low self-esteem are understood as distorted self-evaluations in need of remediation. However, a healthy level of self-esteem is necessary for optimal social and self-functioning. Specific Christian teachings are seen to undergird healthy self-esteem while gradually remediating the distortions of high and low self-esteem.

Organization

The research is organized according to a logical development of the content. Chapter one provides the basic definition of self-esteem. This

undergirds the following chapters which examine specific doctrines in relation to the self-esteem variable. In chapter two the anthropocentric and theocentric factors in the formation of self-esteem are given. The doctrine of human nature falls in the anthropocentric factor category. This doctrine is analyzed in relation to the self-esteem variable. The biblical teaching on human nature is understood to involve two important concepts; sin and the imago dei. These concepts provide the basis for a double self-attitude consisting of self-acceptance and self-denial. In chapter three the doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are analyzed in relation to the self-esteem variable. These doctrines are identified as theocentric factors in the formation of self-esteem. As such they undergird healthy self-esteem while contributing to the gradual remediation of high and low self-esteem.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONCEPT OF SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is generally recognized by personality theorists, clinicians, and social philosophers as a significant component of personality. The concept is valuable in that it is attitudinal and motivational with strong behavioral implications. In order to effectively correlate self-esteem with particular religious beliefs it is necessary to specify the exact nature of the concept. This represents no easy task in light of the vast body of literature dealing with the topic.[1]

The Problem of Definition

A universal definition of the construct of self-esteem is impossible. There are several factors which contribute to this problem. The great diversity within the field of psychology means that the construct

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[1]For an excellent survey of studies in the area of self-esteem see R. C. Wylie, The Self-Concept (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); L. Edward Wells and Gerald Marwell, Self-Esteem: Its Conceptualization and Measurement, Sage Library of Social Research, vol. 20 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976).

is used with various shades of meaning in different theoretical and clinical models. Furthermore, self-esteem is used interchangeably with a variety of self-referent concepts which are similar but not identical.[1]

The complex relationship between psychology and Christianity further complicates the process of definition. The orientation of the field of psychology toward the empirical validation of self-constructs is difficult to integrate with the less empirically oriented theocentric faith structure of Christianity. The anthropocentric bias of psychology conflicts with the theocentric bias of theology. This means that self-esteem in the context of psychology is not identical with its meaning in the context of Christianity.

The obstacles to a definition of the construct of self-esteem are formidable. However, a tentative, working definition is necessary and possible. In order to deal with the obstacles and work toward a

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[1]The psychological research literature uses the following terms to indicate the phenomenon of self-esteem: self-concept, self-image, self-attitudes self-picture, self-acceptance, self-love, self-ideal, ego-ideal, positive self-evaluation, and neurotic egocentricity. Religious literature dealing with self-esteem incorporates many of the previous terms and particular religious concepts; pride, self-acceptance, self-love, humility, and selfishness. The linguistic diversity creates an ambiguous context which eludes narrow, definitive statements.

definition, a particular methodology will be used. First, the broad conceptual field from which self-esteem is derived will be identified. Second, the linguistic parameters of the self-esteem literature will be identified. Finally, major theoretical and theological contributions toward the definition of self-esteem will be surveyed. Each step in the methodological procedure is elaborated in the section that follows.

Methodological Considerations

The first step toward a definition of the construct of self-esteem requires the identification of the larger conceptual field. The conceptual field is the theoretical framework of the self-esteem literature utilized in this research. The construct of self-esteem is derived from literature representing two distinct perspectives; psychology and Christianity. Because self-esteem is derived from such distinct perspectives, both the meaning and significance of the construct is related to the larger conceptual field. A definition of self-esteem which incorporates the insights of Christianity and psychology must of necessity identify the orientation of both disciplines.

The second step in the process of definition requires the identification of the linguistic parameters of the research utilized. Linguistic

parameters are specific terms used to label the phenomenon commonly referred to as self-esteem.[1] The identification of the linguistic parameters will delimit the literature and facilitate the integration of psychological and theological concepts of self-esteem.

The final step toward a definition of self-esteem requires a survey of specific theoretical and theological contributions regarding the construct of self-esteem. Specific contributions will provide the data from which a tentative definition can be formulated. The identification of major agreements and common ideas will be synthetically arranged into a tentative definition.[2]

Conceptual Parameters

Conceptual parameters are the theological and theoretical fields in which the construct of self-esteem is identified. The broadest conceptual

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[1]This narrowing of the linguistic context is to a certain extent an arbitrary decision motivated by the parameters of this research. On the other hand, it represents an attempt to deal with self-esteem from the perspective of the body of literature that identifies the phenomenon under a common etymological structure.

[2]The basis for this approach to a definition of self-esteem is derived from a study in the field of psychology. This study conducted by Wells and Marwell, 59-76, attempted to offer a broad definition of self-esteem based on extensive research regarding its use in various theoretical and clinical systems.

parameters of this study are the fields of psychology and Christianity. This cross-discipline approach is extremely difficult in that the definition of self-esteem is largely conditioned by the conceptual field from which it is derived.[1] The implications of this idea indicate that self-esteem in the context of psychology may not have the same meaning and significance as self-esteem in the context of Christianity.[2] The issue is further complicated by the fact that diverse theoretical perspectives in the field of psychology make it impossible to provide a standard psychological definition. These difficulties are partially alleviated by a recognition that particular psychological perspectives are more germane

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[1]This is particularly true within the field of psychology. But the principle is valid for a cross-discipline study of self-esteem as well. Ibid., 60.

[2]The integration of psychology and Christianity is problematic in that the broad perspectives of each field appear to be diametrically opposed. The orientation of modern psychology is humanist and empiricist with a marked opposition to the Judeo-Christian perspective. See, Paul C. Vitz, Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977). The difficulty of integrating divergent concepts of self-esteem is due to the inherent difficulty of correlating a concept conditioned by materialistic humanism with a theistic belief structure. A recent research thesis indicates that "the empirical problem is entangled in questions of semantics involving humanistic and theistic language structures." P. J. Watson, R. W. Hood, Jr., R. J. Morris, and J. R. Hall, "Religiosity, Sin and Self-Esteem," Journal of Psychology and Theology 13 (1985): 126.

to the Christian perspective than are others.[1] Following is the identification of the broad psychological perspective from which the construct of self-esteem is derived.

In the field of psychology self-esteem is identified in the domain of self-concept research.[2] Self-concept is generally used to refer to the phenomenon of self as an object of self-awareness.[3] The self-concept is divided into phenomenal and non-phenomenal categories. The phenomenal self-concept consists of "conscious perceptions, cognitions, and feelings" about the self as an object.[4] The non-phenomenal self-concept consists of unconscious perceptions, cognitions, and feelings about the self as an object.[5] The phenomenal self-concept has a stronger research base[6] and is more relevant to

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[1]For example, the views of theorists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow receive much more attention in Christian self-esteem literature than does the behaviorist view of B. F. Skinner.

[2]Wylie, The Self Concept, 240-243.

[3]Ibid., 1; Morris Rosenberg, Conceiving the Self (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 6.

[4]Wylie, Self Concept, 6.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Wylie, Self Concept, 114-249.

distinctly Christian studies of self-esteem.[1] For this reason self-esteem will be identified in the context of phenomenological psychology. This literature views the conscious cognitions and affections about the self as an object to be the primary components in the formation of self-esteem.

Linguistic Parameters

The delimitation of the self-esteem literature to manageable proportions requires the identification of linguistic parameters. Linguistic parameters are specific terms used to label the phenomenon of self-esteem. Admittedly, these parameters are subjective and somewhat arbitrary but necessary.

The linguistic parameters of the present research are self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-love. This means that the literature used identifies the construct of self-esteem primarily under these three terms. These terms are the most widely used to identify the phenomenon commonly referred to as self-esteem.

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[1]The most commonly accepted analysis of self-esteem sees it as the result of comparisons between one's perceived self, which combines both the assessments of others and one's private perceptions, and the ideal self, which is both how one feels one would like to be and how one feels one ought to be. Craig W. Ellison, "Self-Esteem: An Overview," in Your Better Self, ed. by Craig W. Ellison (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 3.

Theoretical and Theological Contributions

Theoretical and theological contributions to the concept of self-esteem are ideas derived from psychology and Christianity, respectively. Insights related to the construct of self-esteem will be identified in the context of the views of significant individuals from each field. Specific contributions provide unique bits of data and individual perspectives. The individual data and perspectives will provide the raw material for a cross-discipline definition of self-esteem.

A cross-discipline definition of self-esteem provides a definition of the construct relevant to the fields of psychology and Christianity. A survey of specific contributions suggests the possibility of a construct of self-esteem valuable to a variety of theoretical contexts.[1]

Specific contributions are not considered in chronological sequence. Individuals are analyzed according to general perspective; the first eight are theorists approaching self-esteem from a psychological perspective; the last five are individual Christian

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[1]This is particularly true within the field of psychology; see, Wells and Marwell, 229. However, it would seem that the concept of self-esteem is valuable to other disciplines as well, particularly Christianity.

authors approaching self-esteem from a theological perspective.

William James[1]

William James is considered by many to be the father of modern psychology. He laid the foundation for self study in The Principles of Psychology. His comments on self-esteem have had a great influence on the development of the concept. He observed:

> Its own body, then, first of all, its friends next, and finally its spiritual dispositions, MUST be the supremely interesting OBJECTS for each human mind.[2]

James conceived of three dimensions of the self: (1) the material self, consisting of body, family, and possessions; (2) the social self, the recognition of peers; (3) the spiritual self, the inner or subjective being. He authored the enduring equation of self-esteem as a ratio of actualities (successes) over supposed potentialities (pretensions). The criterion of self-esteem is the attainment of

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[1]William James, The Principles of Psychology, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 291-401.

[2]Ibid., 323.

realistic, socially normative goals. James explained this idea:

> No matter how he feels about himself, unduly elated or unduly depressed, he may still truly know his own worth by measuring it by the outward standard he applies to other men.[1]

In this view, self-esteem is derived from objectively held criteria. The emphasis is on measurable performance rather than subjective feeling. Self-esteem can be maintained even in the face of mood alterations and fluctuating emotion.

G. H Mead[2]

Mead emphasized the social nature of the self. He identified the self as a process that arises out of social experiences. The reflexive character of the self as formed in social intercourse is emphasized. This reflexive, social self is evaluated on the basis of the internalized attitudes of other individuals manifested toward itself through direct social intercourse. The community becomes a "generalized other" which leads to the notion of the generalized self.

The impact of this theory on self-esteem involves the understanding of the self as a set of

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[1]Ibid., 328.

[2]George H. Mead, Mind, Self, and Society, ed. by Charles W. Morris (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1934), 135-226.

reflexive attitudes. Self-esteem is the evaluative component of the reflexive self-attitudes.[1] In this view self-esteem is entirely dependent on the perceptions of significant others.

Abraham Maslow[2]

Abraham Maslow developed the theory of self-actualization. The basic idea involves the identification of a hierarchical system of human needs. In ascending order these needs are: (1) physiological, (2) safety and security, (3) love and belonging, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. Self-actualization is the highest level of self-functioning, atained by the process of sucessful fulfillment of the lower-level needs in ascending order. The frustration of a need at any level inhibits the realization of the next level in the hierarchy. Maslow identified self-esteem as a feeling of superiority and domination over things and others.[3] Self-actualization requires the fulfillment of this self-esteem need.

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[1]Wells and Marwell, 18.

[2]Abraham H. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, 2d ed., (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1968).

[3]Wells and Marwell, 22.

Carl Rogers[1]

Carl Rogers is well known for his unique clinical approach known as client-centered therapy. He explained the purpose of this approach:

> This acceptant attitude toward that which exists, I find developing in clients in therapy. . . . Still another way describing this pattern which I see in each client is to say that increasingly he trusts and values the process which is himself.[2]

According to Rogers, acceptant attitudes consist of cognitions of abilities, actions, and relations. These self-regarding attitudes are multidimensional: (1) cognitive, the content; (2) evaluative, the criterion; and (3) affective, the feelings and emotions. Self-esteem is the affective dimension of the self-attitudes and is equivalent to self-acceptance.[3]

Erich Fromm[4]

Erich Fromm developed the idea that attitudes toward others and self are conjunctive. The consequence of this theory is the prerequisite

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[1]Carl R. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951).

[2]Ibid., 174-175.

[3]Wells and Marwell, 23.

[4]Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper, 1956), 48-51.

condition of self-love before other-love. Fromm stated the idea succinctly:

> Love, in principle, is indivisible as far as the connection between "objects" and one's own self is concerned.[1]

This concept is particularly relevant in that self-love is commonly identified with self-esteem, particularly in religious contexts. The conjunctive nature of self-love and other-love is used to assert that high self-esteem is the prerequisite for high other-esteem.

The conjunctive principle has a particularly potent impact in the area of biblical exegesis. Self-love is widely accepted as the prerequisite for other-love. This idea is transposed into the biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself.

Stanley Coopersmith[2]

Stanley Coopersmith approached self-esteem from a developmental perspective. His study focused on the antecedent conditions of high, medium, and low self-esteem in white, middle-class, grade-school boys. Coopersmith located self-esteem in the context of attitudinal research and identified four crucial

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[1]Ibid., 50.

[2]Stanley Coopersmith, The Antecedents of Self-Esteem (San Francisco: Freeman, 1967).

variables in the developmental process. He offered a definition in the following terms:

> By self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy.[1]

Coopersmith posited the most potent antecedent conditions for self-esteem in the "effective interpersonal environment." These interpersonal factors are more influential than broad social and hierarchical structures. This research strongly suggests the viability of Mead's theory of reflected appraisals. In this view self-esteem is dependent upon the positive reflected appraisals of significant others in the social context, especially the family.

Morris Rosenberg[2]

Morris Rosenberg's research in Society and the Adolescent Self-Image focused on a group of approximately five thousand high school juniors and seniors from ten high schools in New York state. He employed a developmental perspective focusing on the impact of broad social experiences in the formation of

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[1]Ibid., 4-5.

[2]Rosenberg, Conceiving the Self; Morris Rosenberg, Society and the Adolescent Self-Image (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

self-esteem. Rosenberg identified the construct of self-esteem in the category of attitudinal constructs. Self-esteem is the pivotal variable related to the direction (approval/disapproval) of self-attitude. Rosenberg underscored the central importance of values as a criterion of self-evaluation. This means, for example, that a low self-evaluation in an area that is not of great personal or social value will not significantly lower self-esteem.

In a more recent study, Conceiving the Self, Rosenberg identified three regions of the self-concept: (1) the extant self (pictures of what we are like), (2) the desired self (pictures of what we wish to be), and (3) the presenting self (impression management techniques are used to convey an image of how we wish to appear). Self-esteem is understood as a motivational component of the self-concept. The greatest threat to self-esteem is the self-condemnation which follows a violation of the values of the moral self (component of the desired self).

Richard Bednar, M. Gawain Wells, and Scott Peterson[1]

Richard Bednar, M. Wells, and Scott Peterson posited a fundamentally new thesis in regard to self-esteem. They proposed a model distinct from previous research, particularly Mead's social dependence theory in which self-esteem is based on the reflected appraisals of significant others. The authors indicated that intrapsychic rather than interpersonal factors are more potent in the self-esteem process. Intrapsychic factors are identified as the internal cognitive-affective processes influencing the self-esteem variable.

The most potent intrapsychic factors are the processes of coping and avoidance. Self-esteem is enhanced by a coping orientation to life situations in contrast to avoidance techniques. Coping is understood as an innately satisfying psychological experience which forms the basis of self-acceptance. Avoidance strategies imply personal inadequacy and form the basis of negative self-evaluations.

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[1]Richard Bednar, M. Gawain Wells, and Scott R. Peterson, Self-Esteem: Paradoxes and Innovations in Clinical Theory and Practice (Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 1989).

Robert Schuller[1]

Robert Schuller approached the concept of self-esteem from an anthropological perspective. He identified human dignity as the ultimate human need ("the will to self-worth"). Schuller contended for an integrated theological system based on a Reformed theology of self-esteem. The central locus of this system is conceived as the fundamental religious truth of human dignity. He stated this view quite succinctly:

> The gospel message is not only faulty, but potentially dangerous if it has to put a person down before it attempts to lift him up.[2]

Sin is defined as psychological self-abuse and lack of trust and is equated with low self-esteem. Salvation is defined in terms of the human transformation from self-defeating to self-enhancing psychological patterns. The Christian faith is a vast resource of self-esteem-enhancing teachings: creation, the cross and resurrection, Christology, ecclesiology, sanctification, and discipleship.

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[1]Robert Schuller, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation (Waco, TX: Word, 1982).

[2]Ibid., 127.

Anthony Hoekema[1]

The thesis of The Christian Looks at Himself is that the Christian faith, when properly interpreted, is a tremendous resource for a predominantly positive self-image. Anthony Hoekema defined low self-esteem as a psychologically destructive variable with evil social and behavioral consequences. He identified the theological locus of humanity as a new creation in Christ as the centrally significant doctrine for a positive self-image. Hoekema focused on the salvation historical work of Christ on the cross (justification by faith) and its significance for the self-esteem variable. He rejected the notion of a partial self-image based on the recognition of "old" and "new" dimensions of post-conversion personality. A Christian should esteem himself on the basis that he is entirely a new creation in Christ. Hoekema identified other theologically relevant loci for self-esteem: creation, the image of God in humanity, life in the Spirit, and Christian fellowship.

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[1]Anthony Hoekema, The Christian Looks at Himself (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); idem, Created in God's Image (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 102-111.

David Myers[1]

In The Inflated Self, David Myers underscored the fallibility of human knowledge (self-knowledge included). Approaching human nature from a Reformed perspective he utilized relevant psychological research as evidence of the distorted perspectives of all domains of human thought, (i.e. mental/intellectual depravity). In an article dealing with pride, Myers identified the human tendency toward self-enhancement and self-overestimation to challenge the notion that the basic human problem is low self-esteem. He viewed the fundamental human problem as a self-serving bias resulting in an attachment to false securities. Myers accepted the correlation of high self-esteem to effective self-functioning but posited the self-serving bias as a necessary complimentary truth.

John Stott[2]

John Stott emphasized the complex nature of the human self. He identified the self as a composite of

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[1]David G. Myers, The Inflated Self (New York: Seabury Press, 1981); idem, "A New Look at Pride," in Your Better Self, ed. Craig W. Ellison (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 82-97.

[2]John Stott, The Cross of Christ (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 274-289; idem, "Am I Supposed to Love Myself or Hate Myself?" Christianity Today, 20 April 1984, 26-28.

"fallen" and "created" dimensions. Even the renewed self of the Christian has a fallen dimension.

Stott suggested the necessity of a double attitude toward the self: self-denial and self-affirmation. Self-esteem is positively related to rationality, morality, sexuality, family, stewardship, creativity, community, and worship. Self-esteem is negatively related to irrationality, perversion, sexual promiscuity, selfishness, laziness, destructiveness, anti-social tendencies, autonomy, and idolatry.

Stott posited the fundamental importance of three theological loci for self-esteem: creation, recreation, and the cross of Christ. The doctrine of the cross is central in the process of self-understanding for it indicates the need for a multidimensional self-attitude. Stott aptly summarized this perspective:

> On the one hand, the cross is the God-given measure of the value of our true self, since Christ loved us and died for us. On the other hand, it is the God-given model for the denial of our false self, since we are to nail it to the cross and so put it to death.[1]

In this view the self is both affirmed and denied. Internal positive attributes are grounds for high-esteem while internal negative attributes are grounds for low-esteem.

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[1]Stott, Cross, 285.

Ellen G. White[1]

Ellen White identified a fundamentally negative relation between self-esteem and authentic Christian experience. She defined self-esteem primarily in terms of an exalted perception of the achievements and attributes of the self unrelated to the actual reality of the life experience.

White located self-esteem primarily in a category with pride, selfishness, conceit, and vanity.[2] The concept of self-esteem in her writings is best understood as a reference to "inordinate" or high self-esteem. White identified the loss of self-esteem as a process of progressive dehumanization. The idea of a median or an appropriate level of self-esteem is generally identified under the rubric of self-respect.

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[1]Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1955), 319; idem, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 2:175, 297, 301, 629, 630; idem, Testimonies for the Church, 3:552; idem, "The Necessity of Dying to Self," Review and Herald, 18 June 1889; idem, "Walk in the Spirit," Signs of the Times, 25 December 1893; For a full discussion of the concept of self-esteem in the writings of Ellen White see, Paul A. Fisher, "A Study of the Writings of Ellen G. White on the Topic of Self-Esteem," (Unpublished Research Paper, Ellen G. White Research Center, Andrews University, 1991).

[2]Self-esteem was commonly associated with negative affections by White's contemporaries. See James, Principles, 306.

White identified the theologically relevant loci to self-esteem as the creation, obedience to God's commandments, Christology, and the cross of Christ. The self-esteem variable is most significantly related to the perception of the experience of Christ at Calvary.[1] Self-elevation (high self-esteem) and self-devaluation (low self-esteem) are perceptual inaccuracies which can be remediated by the theologically relevant variables in the Christian faith.

A Psycho-Spiritual Definition of Self-Esteem

A psycho-spiritual definition of self-esteem is not a universal definition of self-esteem. The latter is impossible, and the former is highly tentative. A psycho-spiritual definition of self-esteem is developed by a synthetic arrangement of complimentary and common views derived from the theoretical and theological contributions.[2] The following sections identify and

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[1]An elevated perception of Christ on the cross is inversely related to excessive self-esteem and simultaneously correlated to the self-regarding attitudes of self-esteem and self-respect.

[2]In an extensive survey of self-esteem literature Wells and Marwell indicated that the conceptual importance of self-esteem is dependent on the process of "establishing and describing commonalities and points of divergence" among theoretical models. Wells and Marwell, 60.

elaborate the basic components of a psycho-spiritual understanding of self-esteem.

Psychological Process

Definitions and descriptions commonly indicate the cognitive, affective, and evaluative processes involved in the formation of self-esteem.[1] In a healthy person these processes interact to form "a subjective and enduring sense of realistic self-approval."[2] The recognition of these basic psychological processes is fundamental to a psychospiritual theory of self-esteem. However, the relationship and interaction of cognition, affection, and evaluation vary in emphasis and degree among diverse conceptualizations. Self-esteem is fundamentally a psychological process with direct relevance to spiritual formation.

The cognitive dimension of the process is frequently implicit in the evaluative dimension.

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[1]Self-esteem is not a static something but a dynamic somehow. "The evaluative, judgmental, or affective aspect of a person's self-conception involves the process commonly referred to as self-esteem." Wells and Marwell, 59; "By self-esteem we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy." Coopersmith, Antecedents, 4-5.

[2]Bednar et al., 4.

Evaluation consists of an internal judgmental process which distinguishes and compares the real and the ideal self.[1] The real self is identified with the actual self-concept while the ideal self is composed of the ego-ideal[2] and internalized social standards and norms.[3] The discrepancy between the real and ideal self-concepts is generally the variable tested on most self-esteem measurement. However, the feeling about the discrepancy is also quite significant.

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[1]"The most commonly accepted analysis of self-esteem sees it as the result of comparisons between one's perceived self, which combines both the assessments of others and one's private perceptions, and the ideal self, which is both how one feels one would like to be and how one feels one ought to be. The ideal self represents an internalization of values transmitted by significant others and the culture." Ellison, "Self-Esteem," in Your Better Self, 3.

[2]The ego-ideal is a self-dependent, self-referent orientation toward the ideal; the individual's private conception of what she would like to be or should be. Wells and Marwell, 65-66.

[3]Both internal and external self-evaluations are influential in the formation of self-esteem. However, the recent trend is to posit a greater significance to internal self-evaluations. Bednar et al. maintained that "internal self-evaluations play a more important role in determining the form and substance of self-esteem than do external evaluations--though both are clearly influential." Bednar et al., 14; The emphasis on internal, intrapsychic factors in the formation of self-esteem is probably related to the paradigmatic value shift of Western culture toward autonomous, internal, need-oriented values. For an interesting and informative perspective on this paradigm shift, see Marilyn Ferguson, The Aquarian Conspiracy (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980), 323-360.

The affective dimension of the process is frequently identified as the crucial factor in the formation of self-esteem.[1] The "emotional tone" or affective connotation of the self-discrepancy is posited as actual self-esteem.[2] The feeling about the self-discrepancy resulting from the self-evaluative process is identified as the actual measure of selr-esteem.

Conceptual Equivalents

Well's and Marwell's analysis of a large body of self-esteem literature reveals three principal senses of self-esteem: (1) self-love, (2) self-acceptance, and (3) and a sense of competence.[3] Self-love is associated primarily with psychoanalytic and existential psychology[4] which emphasizes the non-phenomenal dimension of self-esteem. However, self-love is important in a psycho-spiritual theory of self-esteem because of its conjunctive connection with

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[1]Wells and Marwell, 59; "High or low levels of self-esteem, then, are the result and reflection of the internal, affective, feedback the organism most commonly experiences." Bednar et al., 14.

[2]From this perspective self-esteem is the feeling about the discrepancy between the ideal and real self. This is in contrast to the position that self-esteem is the discrepancy itself. Wells and Marwell, 68.

[3]Ibid., 61-62.

[4]Ibid.

other-love. The conjunctive nature of self-love is commonly assumed to apply to self-esteem.[1]

Self-acceptance and competence (self-efficacy) are essential components in a psycho-spiritual definition of self-esteem. Nathaniel Branden identified these complimentary components:

> Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: it entails a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth.[2]

Bednar et al. likewise distinguished between these two primary components:

> The performance component of self-esteem, perceived self-efficacy remains only a portion of the total concept of self-esteem. People need acceptance as well as achievement to feel good about themselves.[3]

Due to the significance of these factors they will be considered individually in the following section.

Acceptance and Achievement Components

Self-acceptance is related to the conceptualization of self-esteem as an attitude toward

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[1]The identification of self-esteem as a conjunctive self-attitude entails the acceptance of the assumption that the level of self-esteem is directly related to the level of other-esteem. A low self-esteem individual would presumably be unable to esteem others very highly. High self-esteem is identified as a prerequisite for high other-esteem.

[2]Nathaniel Branden, The Psychology of Self-Esteem (Los Angeles: Nash, 1969), 120.

[3]Bednar et al., 54.

the self as an object. Rosenberg aptly expressed this position in his comments regarding the self-image:

> We conceive of the self-image as an attitude toward an object. (The term "attitude" is used broadly to include facts, opinions, and values with regard to the self, as well as a favorable or unfavorable orientation toward the self.)[1]

A favorable orientation to the self is characterized as self-acceptance. Roger's client-centered therapy represents a clinical application of this generalized conceptual model. The direction of the therapy is toward self-acceptance based on personal, moral, and existential worth.[2] The idea tends toward the perspective that high self-esteem is attainable through an unconditional acceptance of the self irrespective of objective performance.[3] From a developmental perspective antecedent factors in the "immediate interpersonal environment" of children

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[1]Rosenberg, Adolescent Self-Image, 5.

[2]This idea is also identified as "attributions of worth made because of one's class or culture. . . . The salient feature here is that one's status, and so one's worth, is fixed independently of one's conduct. . . . And pretty much the same holds of worth that is attributed to human beings because of their species or to persons because of the kind of beings they are conceived to be: rational ones, say, spiritual ones, or autonomous ones. That is, worth attributed to one because of one's essential nature is, like worth attributed to one because of one's status, fixed independently of how one conducts one's life." John Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem: A Critique," Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy 93 (1983): 241.

[3]Rosenberg, Adolescent Self-Image, 119.

relating to parental acceptance are critical in the formation of self-esteem.[1]

The performance component of self-esteem is achievement oriented. It follows James's basic conception of self-esteem as a ratio of successes to pretensions.[2] This perspective was aptly expressed by Deigh:

> In capsule form, what might be called the auteur theory of worth is that what a person does with his life, how well he directs it, determines his worth. On this theory, then, we attribute different degrees of worth to someone depending on how valuable we deem the kind of life he lives and how successful we think he has been in living it or how suitable we think he is for it.[3]

A sense of self-efficacy and competence are central to the performance component. Bednar et al. posited that negative self-evaluations are based on personal inadequacies implicit in avoidance strategies.[4] A sense of competence is derived by objective accomplishment in relation to normative social criteria and a coping orientation to life situations.[5]

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[1]Coopersmith, Antecedents, 94, 243.

[2]James, Principles, 310.

[3]Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem," 241.

[4]Bednar et al., 107.

[5]Bednar et al. identified process and style (coping orientations) as the primary determinants of self-esteem. The actual achievement is not as crucial

Research Findings

A vast body of research literature is available on the correlation of self-esteem to various behavioral, social, and personal variables. A moderate survey of this literature facilitates the identification of the particular characteristics of high and low self-esteem individuals. The emphasis in the literature is frequently on high and low self-esteem without much emphasis on the median.

Low Self-Esteem

Low self-esteem is generally identified as a psychologically distressing state producing feelings of anxiety.[1] It is associated with neuroses and psychoses.[2] The general orientation of a low-esteem individual is to emphasize deficiencies, weaknesses, and bad qualities.[3] On an interpersonal level low self-esteem is correlated with self-protective

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in the formation of self-esteem as the intra-cognitive processes involved in the coping response style. Ibid., 64.

[1]Coopersmith, Antecedents, 167.

[2]Rosenberg, Adolescent Self-Image, 261.

[3]R. F. Baumeister and D. M. Tice, "Self-Esteem and Responses to Success and Failure: Subsequent Performance and Intrinsic Motivation," Journal of Personality 53 (1985): 451.

relational strategies,[1] indifference,[2] dependence on external self-relevant stimuli for positive evaluations,[3] and emotional instability.[4] Low esteem persons tend to operate with an egotistical bias[5] manifest as a self-serving interpretation of events.[6] The combined potency of these negative correlations suggests the inadequacy of low self-esteem for an optimal level of social and self-functioning.

Although research indicates many correlations to negative variables, low esteem is also correlated with desirable traits and behaviors. Low esteem individuals are open to negative evaluations and

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[1]R. F. Baumeister, Dianne M. Tice, and Debra G. Hutton, "Self-Presentational Motivations and Personality Differences in Self-Esteem," Journal of Personality 57 (1989): 547-579.

[2]Rosenberg, Adolescent Self-Image, 128-146.

[3]J. D. Campbell, B. Chew, and L. S. Scratchley, "Cognitive and Emotional Reactions to Daily Events: The Effects of Self-Esteem and Self-Complexity," Journal of Personality 59 (1991): 477.

[4]P. O. Peretti and P. O'Connor, "Effects of Incongruence between the Perceived Self and the Ideal Self on Emotional Stability of Stripteasers," Social Behavior and Personality 17 (1989): 81-92.

[5]This phenomenon is comparable to the insight that, "Whoever despises himself still esteems the despiser within himself." Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (New York: Gateway Editions, 1955), 76.

[6]B. R. Schlenker, M. F. Weigold, and J. R. Hallam, "Self-Serving Attributions in Social Context: Effects of Self-Esteem and Social Pressure," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 58 (1990): 862.

flexible to change,[1] have the ability to accurately assess conveyed impressions,[2] and cognitively accept positive and negative outcomes of daily events.[3] Low esteem is correlated with greater educational performance, fewer learning problems, and less acting out behavior.[4] The goals of a low esteem individual include the remediation of deficits and the achievement of adequacy; indications of a generally realistic orientation to life.[5] These positive characteristics of low-esteem persons should not be overlooked when trying to assess the moral significance of levels of self-esteem.[6]

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[1]Wells and Marwell, 70-71.

[2]J. D. Campbell and B. Fehr, "Self-Esteem and Perceptions of Conveyed Impressions: Is Negative Affectivity Associated With Greater Realism?" Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 58 (1990): 124, 130.

[3]Campbell et al., "Cognitive and Emotional Reactions," 479.

[4]J. A. Bybee and E. Zigler, "Self-Image and Guilt: A Further Test of the Cognitive Developmental Formation," Journal of Personality 59 (1991): 741.

[5]Baumeister and Tice, "Self-Esteem and Responses," 466.

[6]Dale S. Ryan suggests that high self-esteem should be assessed positively on the basis of its relationship to such virtues as empathy, contentment, honesty, courage, etc. A similar reasoning suggests that low self-esteem should be assessed positively in view of its relationship to the positive traits associated with it. Dale S. Ryan, "Self-Esteem: An Operational Definition and Ethical Analysis," The Journal of Psychology and Theology 11 (1983), 300-301.

High Self-Esteem

The life orientation of high esteem individuals is to emphasize abilities, strengths, and good qualities.[1] Independence and individualism are strong characteristics of this orientation to life. High esteem is correlated with low susceptibility to persuasion and stability of self-concept.[2] The goals of a high esteem individual tend toward the achievement of excellence and the elevation of existing strengths.[3] These positive correlations suggest the desirability of high self-esteem for the achievement of an optimal level of self-functioning.

Although correlated with positive interpersonal and behavioral variables high esteem is also linked to less desirable traits and behaviors. High esteem is correlated to egotism[4] and self-serving interpretations of events (boasting).[5] High-esteem

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[1]Ibid., 450-451; This is characterized by a self-enhancing, self-presentational style of relating to others. Baumeister et al., "Self-Presentational Motivations," 547-579.

[2]Wylie, Self-Concept, 159.

[3]Baumeister and Tice, "Self-Esteem and Responses," 450-467.

[4]D. M. Tice and R. F. Baumeister, "Self-Esteem, Self-Handicapping, and Self-Presentation: The Strategy of Inadequate Practice," Journal of Personality 58 (1990): 461.

[5]Schlenker et al., "Self-Serving Attributions," 862.

individuals employ the self-defeating defensive strategies of narcissism[1] and self-handicapping.[2] A correlation exists between high self-esteem and the inability to effectively handle social indebtedness.[3] These negative associations of high self-esteem are significant in the assessment of the moral and spiritual estimation of levels of self-esteem.

Moral Estimates of Self-Esteem Levels

The identification of correlational variables with self-esteem is not to be confused with the process of assigning value to those correlations. Assigning a moral value to a particular level of self-esteem is a

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[1]Narcissism is identified as a pattern of grandiosity functioning as a self-esteem enhancing defensive strategy. R. Raskin, J. Novacek, and R. Hogan, "Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Defensive Self-Enhancement," Journal of Personality 59 (1991): 19-38.

[2]Self-handicapping is identified as a "placing of obstacles in the way of task performance to furnish external attribution when an outcome is uncertain." The form of self-handicapping in the research article involved a strategic reduction of preparatory effort in the face of public awareness of practice time. Self-handicapping is recognized as a self-defeating behavior pattern. Tice and Baumeister, "Self-Handicapping and Self-Presentation," 443-464.

[3]"High esteem individuals are least likely to seek help when the chance of reciprocity is unlikely. . . . This seems to indicate a high sense of self-threat in receiving aid. . . . It would appear that indebtedness is incongruent with self-relevant cognitions of competence and self-reliance." A. Nadler, O. Mayseless, N. Peri, and A. Chemerinski, "Effects of Opportunity to Reciprocate and Self-Esteem on Help-Seeking Behavior," Journal of Personality 53 (1985): 23-35.

complex task. The most common position is to assume that high self-esteem is a prerequisite of healthy self-functioning.[1] However, the research literature pertinent to the self-esteem variable does not provide substantial validation of this hypothesis.[2] The complexity of the self-concept and subjectivity of the self-esteem variable require a tenuous approach to the moral evaluation of the level of self-esteem.

Research literature pertinent to the self-esteem variable suggests the importance of self-esteem as a positive self-regarding attitude. However, it is an unwarranted assumption to identify high self-esteem as the appropriate level for optimal self-functioning. The research findings are too mixed to make such an assumption. From a Christian perspective it would seem that high or low levels of self-esteem are potentially counterproductive to Christian experience. However, there is no question that an adequate level of self-esteem is related to effective self-functioning.

Self-Esteem and Religious Beliefs

The empirical correlation of specific religious beliefs to levels of self-esteem is highly tenuous.

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[1]Wells and Marwell, 70.

[2]The research literature on the self-concept is ambiguous, contradictory, and empirically tenuous. Wylie, Self Concept, 317-324.

Studies in this area have yielded mixed results.[1] For this reason theological contributions of significant Christian thinkers will be combined with empirical studies to identify the relationship of specific Christian doctrines with self-esteem.

These sources indicate that a correspondence exists between specific biblical teachings and self-esteem. These biblical teachings or theological loci are: the doctrine of human nature, the doctrine of God, the doctrine of Christ, and the doctrine of the cross. The relationship of each theological locus and self-esteem will be considered separately in the following chapters.

Summary and Conclusion

The self-esteem construct defies rigid definition and does not lend itself to empirical validation. However, self-esteem is generally recognized as a cognitive, affective, and evaluative psychological process with behavioral and social consequences. A psycho-spiritual definition of self-esteem combines the psychological process and the

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[1]P. J. Watson, R. J. Morris, and R. W. Hood, Jr., "Antireligious Humanistic Values, Guilt, and Self-Esteem," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 26 (1987): 535-546; idem, "Intrinsicness, Religious Self-Love, and Narcissism," The Journal of Psychology and Christianity 7 (1988): 31-37; Watson et al., "Religiosity and Self-Esteem," 116-128.

spiritual experience. Self-esteem is a psychological process that affects and is affected by specific Christian beliefs.

The research supports the tenuous claim that a certain level of self-esteem is necessary for optimal self/social-functioning. It is commonly assumed that a high level of self-esteem is best. This is at best a very tenuous assumption. Empirical studies indicate both positive and negative traits and behaviors related to high self-esteem. Christian thought likewise indicates the possible negative relationship between high self-esteem and Christian experience.

The correlation of self-esteem and Christian belief is a valuable, though highly complex, endeavor. In the following chapters specific theological loci will be carefully analyzed in relation to the self-esteem variable. Empirical studies and Christian reflection will be used to determine the nature of the relationship. This process might possibly yield valuable insights relating to the impact of doctrine on the level of social interaction and self-functioning.

CHAPTER 2

SELF-ESTEEM AND THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Introduction

The problem addressed in this chapter concerns the relationship of self-esteem to theological anthropology. Anthropology is the study of human beings in relation to distribution, origin, classification, relations, and culture.[1] Theological anthropology, therefore, is the discipline that attempts to understand the human being in a theological context.[2] This area of study is generally identified as the doctrine of human nature.[3] The God-human relationship is of primary importance in this perspective.

Theological anthropology is currently an area of great interest in the theological community. It has

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[1]Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1986), 90.

[2]For a more complete understanding of this concept see, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Anthropology in Theological Perspective, trans. by M. J. O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 11-23.

[3]For the standard scholarly reference on this subject, see H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Doctrine of Man, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1926).

become an increasingly central issue in biblical studies. The present emphasis on theological anthropology is at least partially a response to the radical anthropocentrism of modernity. This is a seriously debated issue and is very relevant in the discussion of self-esteem and Christian beliefs. For this reason we will begin with a discussion of the issues involved in an anthropocentric approach to reality. This will provide the general background for a delineation of the role of self-esteem in a Christian theological context.

In order to effectively examine the relationship between self-esteem and theological anthropology it is necessary to deal with various dimensions of the anthropological belief structure. The anthropological belief structure is the total package of cognitive information relating to the nature of humanity. This cognitive structure is composed of various dimensions. These dimensions include specific biblical words identifying the self, a general concept of the self, and concepts such as the imago dei and notions about sin. An analysis will be made of each particular dimension of a theological anthropology in light of the concept of self-esteem as defined in chapter one and with reference to other theological and empirical studies pertinent to the discussion.

Anthropocentric Methodology

The field of psychology is eminently humancentered. It operates on the assumption that reality is best understood and explained from the perspective of the human personality. Theology is eminently God-centered. It operates on the assumption that reality is best understood with reference to the being and sovereignty of God. Any attempt to integrate theological and psychological perspectives is complicated by this tension.[1]

This tension is manifest in the debate over anthropocentrism and theocentrism. Anthropocentrism is basically a methodological approach which takes the human person as its starting point for the interpretation of reality. Proponents of anthropocentrism must be understood in the context of modern philosophical thought. Wolfhart Pannenberg

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[1]Research in this area has identified this tension as "linguistic incompatibilities between theistic and more secularized conceptualizations of the self." Watson et al, "Antireligious Humanistic Values," 535-546.

clearly explained the modern approach to reality with a view toward its implications:

> Modern thought, however, had to renounce the claim that there is a physical necessity of accepting the existence of God as first cause of the natural process. The reason was that once the principle of inertia was introduced or, at the latest, once the mechanistic theory of the origin of the planets was accepted, modern physics seemed no longer to need "the God hypothesis."[1]

Although from the modern perspective God is no longer a viable option, the phenomenon of religion must still be explained. In this philosophical context theology is reduced to anthropology and religion is interpreted psychologically.[2] A radical example of this is Sigmund Freud's idea that the concept of God the Father is the "wish-fulfillment" of a helpless and impotent humanity.[3] This reduction of Christianity to

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[1]Pannenberg, 12.

[2]Ludwig Feuerbach, "The Essence of Religion," in The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 54-63.

[3]Freud focused on the "psychical origins of religious ideas." Using this methodology he speculated on the idea of divine providence. "We know already that the terrifying effect of infantile helplessness aroused the need for protection--protection through love--which the father relieved, and that the discovery that this helplessness would continue through the whole of life made it necessary to cling to the existence of a father-- but this time a more powerful one." Thus, a humanity truly come of age must forsake all such "illusions" in order to be truly psychologically healthy. Sigmund Freud, "The Future of an Illusion," in The Treasury of Modern Religious Thought, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company,

the state of a psychological pathology is a serious issue. Pannenberg emphasized the importance of meeting the challenge credibly:

> If it can be shown that all religion is simply a product of the human imagination and an expression of a human self-alienation, the roots of which are analyzed in a critical approach to religion, then religious faith and especially Christianity with its tradition and message will lose any claim to universal credibility in the life of the modern age.[1]

He identified this challenge as one of the major reasons suggesting the need of a thoroughly theological anthropology.[2] In other words, theology must be concerned to establish the credibility of the human in order to establish the credibility of religious faith.

However, not all anthropocentrism represents an attempt to undermine the existence of God. There is another form of anthropocentrism which reasons from the human to the divine in order to understand the being of God. This is in actuality the projection of human qualities to a transcendent level. Karl Barth understood this as the analogia entis (analogy of being) principle of Roman Catholic theology which he

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1990), 75.

[1]Pannenberg, Anthropology, 15.

[2]Pannenberg also finds in the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of God support for a "theological concentration on the person." Pannenberg, Anthropology, 12.

rejected as a form of idolatry invented by the antichrist.[1] This type of anthropocentrism attributes to the divine, in an accentuated and elevated capacity, that which belongs to the human realm.

Schuller used an anthropocentric methodology in his book Self-Esteem: The New Reformation. He developed a system of theology taking as the starting point the human need for glory and dignity.[2] Using this approach he identified the incarnation, cross, and resurrection as "self-esteem building compliments."[3] This represents an interpretation of salvation-historical events in an anthropocentric context. This approach begins with an a priori assumption concerning human nature (it is basically good) which becomes the control for interpreting the major tenants of the Christian faith.

Anthropocentrism often operates on the a priori assumption that human nature is fundamentally good. This is particularly true in the field of psychology. Maslow in reference to the process of self-actualization revealed his own assumption that

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[1]Clifford Green, ed., Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom, The Making of Modern Theology, ed. by John W. de Gruchy, vol. 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 27.

[2]Schuller, Self-Esteem, 35, 145-176.

[3]Ibid., 100.

human nature, the "inner core" or "real self," is basically "good, trustworthy, and ethical."[1] This teaching finds a responsive element in the form of a more humanistic approach to Christianity. Hans LaRondelle pointed out that all forms of humanism take as a starting point "the nobility and dignity of man, based on the natural and autonomous human spirit."[2] The concepts of human dignity and the autonomous human spirit represent unique challenges for a theological anthropology.

This challenge is complicated by the fact that such a high view of the self is not entirely incompatible with the Christian teaching regarding human nature.[3] Christian belief is also sensitive to

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[1]Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, 161-162.

[2]Hans K. LaRondelle, Perfection and Perfectionism, Andrews University Monographs Studies in Religion Series, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971), 24.

[3]John Calvin commenting on Ps 8:2, 4: "Thus he declares not only that the human race are a bright mirror of the Creator's works, but that infants hanging on their mother's breasts have tongues eloquent enough to proclaim his glory without the aid of other orators." John Calvin, "The Knowledge of God Conspicuous in the Creation and Continual Government of the World," in Readings in Christian Theology, vol. 1, edited by Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 139; Ellen White refers to the "idea that it is necessary only to develop the good that exists in man by nature" as a "fatal deception." However, it is interesting to notice that she does not attack the idea that good exists in man by nature; she was against the idea that to develop this innate good is the exclusive purpose of human activity. In another

the importance of human dignity. V. Norskov Olsen quoted Francis Schaeffer in regard to this issue:

> We must understand that the question of the dignity of human life is not something on the periphery of Judeo-Christian thinking, but almost in the center of it (though not the center because the center is the existence of God Himself).[1]

The dignity and autonomy of the self are important issues in the context of self-esteem. The concept of dignity relates to the nature of the self. This issue will be covered in the section on theological anthropology. The concept of human autonomy will be addressed in the following section.

The Role of Self-Esteem

To understand the role of self-esteem in the fields of psychology and theology it is necessary to identify the role of the self in those systems. Modern anthropocentric approaches, which includes the field of psychology, posit the autonomous self as the central reference point. A major criticism of this approach

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place she mentions the "sacred harmonies of the soul." E. G. White, Steps to Christ (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1908), 18-19, 80.

[1]V. Norskov Olsen, Man, the Image of God (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988), 34.

from a Reformed perspective was made by Cornelius Van Til:

> For if we first allow the legitimacy of the natural man's assumption of himself as the ultimate reference point in interpretation in any dimension we cannot deny his right to interpret Christianity itself in naturalistic terms.[1]

This is a serious and legitimate claim. A human-centered approach can very easily degenerate into a rejection of the divine. For this reason, theological approaches to the self emphasize the self as a non-autonomous, dependent being. However, the human person is an integral part of the divine revelation and should not be obscured by an extreme theocentrism. Reformed theology has a tendency to negate the self in its attempt to establish a God-centered theology.

The assumption of the autonomy of the self in the field of psychology poses a unique challenge for theology. E. B. Holifield in, A History of Pastoral Care in America, offered an insightful analysis of the

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[1]Cornelius Van Til, "The Reformed Position," in Readings in Christian Theology, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 62.

problem that psychological language imposes on theology:

> In an era of religious doubt within individuals and self-doubt within religious institutions, however, the temptation to allow the psychological language to overwhelm or define the religious tradition has often been irresistible. . . . historic traditions of language are possessed of an unyielding integrity that resists a simple translation into the terms of another realm of discourse (emphasis supplied).[1]

The psychological premise of the autonomous self should not overwhelm the theological conviction of the centrality of God. The implications of this insight for theology can be understood when the role of self-esteem is analyzed in the psychological tradition. The following section will attempt to indicate the place which self-esteem occupies in psychology.

Self-Esteem in the Psychological Perspective

An anthropocentric basis for self-esteem is apparently the assumption of the psychological perspective. Self-esteem is related entirely to the

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[1]E. B. Holifield, A History of Pastoral Care in America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 355.

human situation. Nathaniel Branden stated this view succinctly:

> Since man is the motor of his own actions, since his concept of himself, of the person he has created, plays a cardinal role in his motivation--he desires and needs the fullest possible experience of the reality and objectivity of that person, of his self (emphasis supplied).[1]

In this perspective the fullest possible experience of the self is a necessary foundation for healthy self-esteem. One practicing pscyhotherapist expressed a similar idea in explaining that the self-image furnishes the "potential and limits of individual existence."[2] In this view self-esteem is identified exclusively with intrapsychic and interpersonal factors. Self-esteem is derived completely from the human sphere with no reference to the divine. This does not necessarily imply a rejection of the divine but only an exclusive focus on the human. The dynamics of self-esteem within this system will inevitably be different than in a theological context.

Self-Esteem in the Theological Perspective

The role of self-esteem in a theological context should not be conditioned by the psychological definition of self-esteem. Watson et al. emphasized

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[1]Branden, Psychology of Self-Esteem, 213.

[2]M. F. Basch, Understanding Psychotherapy (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 19.

the difference between the dynamics of self-esteem in a Christian and secular context:

> The contrast between secular and "Christian" humanism therefore may not be in terms of the presence or absence of self-esteem but rather in the dynamics of that self-esteem. For the secular humanist, self-esteem presumably rests upon the self accepting itself without any divine mediation. For a Christian "humanist," the self is flawed by the sin of pride; and the act of a self accepting itself is necessarily vulnerable to the same consequences of this flaw (emphasis supplied).[1]

The idea of self-esteem without divine mediation is the point at which the theological view of self-esteem departs from the psychological. Theology cannot accept the autonomous self as the only basis for self-esteem. Theology is concerned with the impact of God upon the self-esteem variable. The anthropocentric basis of self-esteem is neither exclusive nor ultimate. Theology identifies the divine factors in the formation of self-esteem. These divine factors provide a theocentric basis for self-esteem. In this view self-esteem is derived from the being and doing of God. It is God himself who establishes human value. He is the ultimate reference point for self-esteem.[2]

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[1]Watson et al., "Religiosity, Sin and Self-Esteem," 118.

[2]This idea will be elaborated and expanded in chapter three.

On the other hand, human factors provide an anthropocentric basis for self-esteem. The broad human factors in the development of self-esteem are relationships, personal acceptance and achievement.[1] In this perspective the factors relevant in the formation of self-esteem are identified entirely in the human context. Theology must allow for this anthropocentric basis of self-esteem without reducing itself completely to such a psychological understanding.

The approach suggested in this study is an anthropologically modified theocentrism. This means that self-esteem is derived from two sources; God and the human sphere. The dynamics of self-esteem in this perspective include human and divine factors. The divine and human factors involved in the formation of self-esteem are listed in table 1.

Self-esteem operates within a theological context in a different way than it does within a psychological context. Self-esteem has both an anthropocentric and a theocentric basis. The idea is to maintain each perspective in tension. Human factors should not be minimized in an attempt to establish a totally theocentric basis for self-esteem. Neither

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[1]Psychologically it is well established that self-esteem is intrinsically related to each of these factors. See, Bednar et al., Self-Esteem, chaps. 1-2.

should the divine factors be reduced in an attempt to establish an exclusively anthropocentric foundation for self-esteem. The anthropologically modified theocentric approach can be visualized as two foci within a sphere. The sphere represents all the factors relevant to the formation of self-esteem. The foci are the sources from which self-esteem relevant factors are derived; human and divine.

TABLE 1

SELF-ESTEEM FACTORS

ANTHROPOCENTRIC FACTORS (Human-centered)	THEOCENTRIC FACTORS (God-centered)
Achievement/Acceptance	God's Being
Personal Relationships	Incarnation
Imago Dei	Justification
Sin	Sanctification

This position is an attempt to mediate between extremes. The idea that self-esteem is unimportant tends toward the denigration of the person. The idea that self-esteem is all important tends toward the deification of the person. A mediate position

recognizes self-esteem as significant but not supreme, important but not paramount.[1]

The following section will examine the nature of the self from which self-esteem is derived. The self is one important source of the relevant anthropocentric factors in the formation of self-esteem. Therefore, the nature of this self is directly relevant to the formation of self-esteem.[2]

A Brief Overview of Concepts of the Self

The self has been the subject of much thought and speculation through the centuries. The most significant of these conceptions will be presented in a brief overview. This overview is not intended to be in strict chronological sequence.

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[1]This view seems to be present in Ellen White's understanding of self-esteem. "If you form too high an opinion of yourself, you will think that your labors are of more real consequence than they are, and you will plead individual independence which borders on arrogance. If you go to the other extreme and form too low an opinion of yourself, you will feel inferior and will leave an impression of inferiority which will greatly limit the influence that you might have for good. You should avoid either extreme. Feeling should not control you; circumstances should not affect you. You may form a correct estimate of yourself, one which will prove a safeguard from both extremes." Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, 3:506.

[2]Psychologically the self can only provide an adequate basis for self-esteem if it is a responsible, rational and active agent. An innept, irrational, irresponsible, and passive self is hardly a satisfactory foundation for a healthy sense of self-esteem.

Homer conceived of the human being as entirely passive and determined by the gods (fate).[1] In contrast to this was the hellenistic perception of a rational, acting self with actual ontological being.[2] Aristotle identified the self under the rubric of the soul and defined it as the principle of animal life (all creatures) and immortal mind (man alone).[3] Plato viewed the self as a copy of the universal idea of self.[4] Origen defined the self as a declension from spirituality to corporeality as a result of the fall.[5] Augustine equated self with soul and conceived it as immaterial spiritual essence.[6] Aquinas defined self as rational, immaterial, independent of matter, and immortal.[7] Descartes equated self with the rational mind of man. This concept is epitomized in the phrase

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[1]Barry R. Schlenker, "Introduction: Foundations of the Self in Social Life," in The Self and Social Life, edited by Barry R. Schlenker (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 1-28.

[2]Ibid.; Reinhold Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 77.

[3]Schlenker, "Introduction," 1-28.

[4]A. C. Outler, "Problems of 'Selfhood' in a Christian Perspective," in The Book of the Self, edited by Polly Young-Eisendrath and James A. Hall (New York: New York University, 1987), 411.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Schlenker, "Introduction," 1-28.

[7]Ibid.

"I think therefore I am."[1] Immanuel Kant viewed the self as an objective reality inaccessible to the mind.[2] Jean Paul Sartre conceived of self as "nothing" having only perpetually open possibilities.[3] The controversial sociologist, Erving Goffman, identified the self as a public presentation of approved social attributes. The main idea is manifestation of a variety of "situated identities" depending on the social expectation and context.[4] Soren Kierkegaard equated the self with the process of subjectivity thus stripping it of objective content.[5] Reinhold Niebuhr identified the self as an empirically verifiable object with a transcendental dimension.[6]

This brief historical overview highlights the philosophical complexity of the nature of the self. It should be obvious that no universally recognized concept of self exists. However, modern thought

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Kant defined the self as the "transcendental unity of apperception." Ibid.

[3]Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1981), 31.

[4]Schlenker, "Introduction," 21.

[5]Outler, "Problems of 'Selfhood'," 417.

[6]Niebuhr suggested that the self is in time and beyond time, in space and beyond space.; Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, 24.

regarding the self has been heavily influenced by the views of William James and George Herbert Mead.

James in his influential book The Principles of Psychology identified two aspects of the self, the "me" and the "I."[1] The "me" is the objective dimension consisting of the central feeling of the body and general emotional tones.[2] The "I" is the subjective dimension defined as a "cognitive phenomenal event in time."[3] The "I" is that which forms a conception of the "me" but is itself not subject to analysis. James insisted that at least for the field of psychology the self is defined as an empirical and verifiable reality.[4]

Mead in Mind, Self, and Society defined the self from a sociological perspective. He explained that the self arises only in the development of social experiences.[5] The self becomes an object to itself as it takes the attitudes of others towards itself.[6] Group attitudes are internalized into the individuals experiential field and constitute the elements in the

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[1]James, Principles, 371.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 369.

[4]Ibid., 336.

[5]Mead, Mind, 135.

[6]Ibid., 138.

structure of the self.[1] From this perspective the self originates and is entirely grounded in the social process.

This brief overview of the self in philosophical perspective provides the foundation for some general observations. The self is somewhat of a mystery and a problem.[2] It defies rigid definition and inflexible categorization.[3] However, there is a sense in which the idea of an active, inner core of being seems present in many of the concepts of the self. This active, inner core is usually identified with the mental processes without being necessarily equated with those processes. This means, philosophically, that the self is viewed as an empirical-transcendental reality. The self includes physical and cognitive dimensions but is simultaneously perceived as an immaterial and spiritual reality.

Theological Anthropology

It is important to specify what is and is not meant by theological anthropology in this section. The term is not used in the sense of deriving a concept of

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[1]Ibid., 159.

[2]Outler, "Problems of 'Selfhood'," 417.

[3]This might possibly be deduced as evidence that human beings truly are created in the image of God.

the self directly from the Bible. This would require much more careful attention to exegesis and to subtle differences in psychological and theological language. Theological anthropology is used to refer to a biblically informed doctrine of human nature.[1] It is assumed that there exists an affinity between the "self" and that which the Bible identifies as belonging to the realm of human nature.

Biblical Self-referent Terms

The following analysis is cursory, dealing only with the NT terms most relevant to the relationship of self-esteem and biblical anthropology.

Anthropos is the word generally used to identify the human species as distinct from all other species. This term especially signifies the limited nature of human thought and conduct in contrast to God.[2] It emphasizes the creaturely nature of the human as dependent upon the Creator God. The NT makes a division within the general category of anthropos. The human species is subdivided into two distinct groups. The expression o palaios anthropos (the old man) refers to the sinful being of the unregenerate

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[1]For a scholarly study dealing with the Christian doctrine of human nature, see H. Wheeler Robinson, The Christian Doctrine of Man, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1926).

[2]J. Jeremias, "Anthropos," TDNT (1964): 1:364.

person.[1] However, o kainos/neos anthropos (the new self) refers to the renewed nature of the convert to Christ.[2]

There are various words in the NT that refer to the person; body, flesh, soul, and spirit. Older notions of theological anthropology tended to view this as an indication of the tripartite structure of human nature. In modern scholarship these terms are generally understood to refer to the whole person from a particular perspective. Rudolph Bultmann in reference to the terms referring to the person in Pauline anthropology observed:

> They do not refer to parts of man, individual members or organs, but rather always mean man as a whole with respect to some specific possibility of his being. For this reason, Paul can also use almost every one of these concepts in the sense of "I" (emphasis supplied).[3]

This understanding gives the perspective of a wholistic view of the person in the writings of the NT. However, the person as a whole can be viewed from a particular dimension of the total package of human being.

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[1]Ibid., 365.

[2]Ibid.

[3]R. A. Johnson, ed., Rudolph Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era, The Making of Modern Theology, series ed. John W. de Gruchy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 220-221.

Soma is the word used to refer to the body, whether living or dead, human or animal.[1] Viewed from this perspective the self is a physical and biological organism.

A more comprehensive term dealing with human nature is sarx. Ernst Kasemann distinguished between sarx and soma:

> Man's body (soma) can be contrasted with his soul, mind or reason, whereas flesh (sarx) . . . includes all this because, even in these latter possibilities, we are still nothing more than creatures (emphasis supplied).[2]

Sarx includes everything in the "entire sphere of what is immediately evident."[3] The use of sarx in the NT reflects a dual meaning. Sarx is often translated "sinful nature" (Rom 7:5, 25; 8:3, 8, 9; Gal 5:13, 17). Used in this sense it refers to that which is worst in the human personality. David Clark

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[1]Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2d ed., translated by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer's fifth edition, 1958 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 799.

[2]Ernst Kasemann, Perspectives on Paul, translated by Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 25.

[3]This can include national advantage, legal correctness, the accomplishments of the man who exists under the law, human wisdom, and even works righteous ness. Johnson, Bultmann, 223.

explained the meaning of sarx in this usage:

> It seems better to think of sarx as the instrument of sin, that principle of sinful perversity, with which fallen humans are infected. . . . the characteristic of bentness, the quality of moral perversity, that persistently pushes human beings toward sin.[1]

In addition to the above mentioned usage sarx can refer simply to that which is related to the physical existence of the person (Rom 1:3; 6:19; 2 Cor 4:11; Eph 6:5). This is an important distinction because it disallows the identification of all that is within the sphere of humanness as sinful and depraved. Of course, all creation is in need of redemption, but this does not mean that everything physical and earthly is inferior and sinful.

Psyche is a difficult and many-sided word. As it is used in the NT it refers to the realm of physical life on earth.[2] It is distinguished from the body but is at the same time intimately related to it.[3] Psyche is rendered "soul" in many translations (2 Cor 12:15; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 4:19). As such it is the seat and center of the inner life of the person in its various aspects; desire for luxury and comfort (Ps 106:9;

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[1]David Clark, "Interpreting the Biblical Words for the Self," Journal of Psychology and Theology 18 (1990): 313.

[2]Eduard Schweizer, "Psyche," TDNT, edited by G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974).

[3]Ibid., 645-646.

Prov 25:25), evil desires, and feelings and emotions (Matt 26:38; Mark 14:34).[1] The psyche is more precious than any other thing in the world (Matt 16:26; Mark 8:37).

Pneuma is a word with vast etymological background. The relevant anthropological meaning of the term is as an indication of the "inner dimension" of humans in contrast to the outer (2 Cor 7:1; Col 2:5).[2] It is generally understood in terms of a spiritual or immaterial aspect of human nature (i.e., the true inner self). The term encompasses the personality as a self-conscious, willing, and knowing entity.[3] The human pneuma is capable of renewal by the divine pneuma.[4] The pneuma requires renewal and sanctification in the same way as the flesh (1 Cor 7:34; 2 Cor 7:1).[5]

The anthropological terminology in the NT can be used to formulate a general theological conception of the self. The self encompasses the whole person--that is, the bodily and spiritual dimensions. Each

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[1]Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon, 893.

[2]G. E. Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 461.

[3]Ibid., 462.

[4]Ibid., 463.

[5]Ibid., 460.

dimension is affected by the power of sin and is therefore subject to degeneration and death. However, this does not mean that the self is completely a negative reality. Clark has suggested a dual sense of self in the NT:

> A serious problem concerns the relationship between two senses of "self." Self can mean egocentricity, selfishness, or self-worship . . . . But self can also mean me, myself, my person, soul, or spirit.[1]

This necessarily leads to the conception of self as a complex composite of good and evil. There is a two-fold sense in which the self represents both that which is human and that which is sinful in humans. As representing that which is human the self carries no negative connotations. As representing that which is sinful in humans it is a positive evil. The salvation process requires the redemption of that which is human and the destruction of that which is sinful.[2]

The conception of self as delineated above contains two elements which are especially relevant to the self-esteem variable. These two dimensions of theological anthropology are the imago dei, and the concept of sin. Each of these dimensions will be dealt with in the following sections.

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[1]Clark, "Biblical Words for the Self," 314.

[2]The relationship of soteriology and self-esteem will be covered in chapter three.

The Concept of Image

The imago dei (Latin) is the image of God in humanity. The idea is derived from the Genesis narrative of the creation of the human species (Gen 1:26-27). As such it refers to the original divine design in the creative actualization of the first humans.

The attempts to define the exact nature of this image are numerous. In the context of Gen 1 the concept of dominion is clearly included (cf. Ps 8).[1] The image of God is understood as being mirrored in personal being, spirituality, human works and activity in relation to the kingdom of God, morality, rationality, and the creative capacity of the male-female relationship.[2] The concept of image may also include the outward form of the person.[3] Stott

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[1]William Dyrness, Themes in Old Testament Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 83.

[2]Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, Modern Psychotherapies (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 43-44.

[3]Dyrness, Theology, 83.

identified commonly accepted components of the image of God:

> So then, whatever we are by creation we must affirm: our rationality, our sense of moral obligation, our sexuality (whether masculinity or femininity), our family life, our gifts of aesthetic appreciation and artistic creativity, our stewardship of the fruitful earth, our hunger for love and experience of community, our awareness of the transcendent majesty of God, and our inbuilt urge to fall down and worship him.[1]

G. C. Berkouwer referred to the image as "true human nature."[2] The imago dei is a complex multifaceted reality which points to the origin, nature, and significance of the human being in the created order.

The concept of the imago dei is relevant to the concept of self-esteem in that it provides a foundation for a positive evaluation of the human self. E. L. Johnson understood this as "a primordial sense of positive self-esteem" based on being created in God's image.[3] This affirmation is important in that it relates to the NT sense in which the anthropological terms for the self refer to humanness (John 1:14;

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[1]Stott, Cross, 282.

[2]G. C. Berkouwer, Man: The Image of God, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 117.

[3]E. L. Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," Journal of Psychology and Theology 13 (1985): 232.

Rom 1:3; 1 Cor 15:39). Christian faith is self-affirmative in that it affirms that which is human.[1] However, the imago dei is not the only dimension of theolgical anthropology which relates to the self-esteem variable.[2]

The Concept of Sin

The concept of sin appears to lie at the heart of the controversy surrounding the relation of Christian beliefs to self-esteem. Watson et al. identified the problem of sin as it relates to self-esteem in the following terms:

> The Christian doctrine of sin may present unique difficulties in attempts to demonstrate how religious faith promotes positive self-attitudes.[3]

Research conducted in this area indicates that the reason for this difficulty lies in the "self

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[1]The NT also reflects a self-deprecatory tone (Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). The apparent contradiction in this two-fold understanding is somewhat alleviated by the linguistic principle of polysemy. "This linguistic phenomenon denotes the tendency of languages to economize by letting one group of letters stand for several words. One linguistic form, in other words, can stand for several unrelated words." The anthropological terms for the self in the NT tend to have a double meaning. They can refer to that which is human and also to that which is sinful in humans. Clark, "Biblical Words for the Self," 312.

[2]We are operating on the principle that "Human self-esteem ought to reflect all that we are before God." Ibid. (emphasis supplied)

[3]Watson et al., "Religiosity," 118.

deprecatory nature of orthodox statements about sin."[1] These self-deprecatory statements are incompatible with the instruments most commonly used to measure self-esteem. For this reason it is common for believers to appear maladjusted on explicitly humanistic self measures. Watson et al. explained that one of the underlying reasons for this phenomenon is a basic incompatibility between religious language about the self and humanistic assumptions implicit in the self-esteem instruments.[2] Many of the items on these instruments are congruent with self-esteem and yet antithetical to conservative religious values.[3] The humanistic bias of these instruments renders their judgments about the incompatibility of self-esteem and the concept of sin unreliable.

It will be good at this point to briefly examine the orthodox notions about sin which are problematic to self-esteem. E. B. Holifield, in A History of Pastoral Care in America, identified four major positions on the definition of sin in the Christian tradition: (1) the Catholic equation of sin as "status and transgression" with the emphasis on the

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[1]Watson et al., "Antireligious Humanistic Values," 543.

[2]Ibid., 536.

[3]Ibid., 543.

transgression of known laws, (2) Luther's view of sin as a "condition of faithlessness" that could find expression even in praiseworthy acts, (3) Calvin's understanding of sin as a rebellious will manifest in disobedience to God, and (4) the Anglican idea of sin as disorder.[1] From this brief overview it can be seen that the concept of sin includes the major ideas of transgression, faithlessness, rebellion, and disorder. From a historical Christian perspective all is not good within the self. Sin represents a fundamental problem with the self which requires serious pastoral attention. The recognition of these problems with human nature appear to lie at the heart of the self-deprecatory statements advanced by Christianity (e.g., "deny yourself," "crucify self," etc.).

In order to overcome the impact of such self-deprecatory views of the self many Christians are redefining sin. As a representative of this group, Schuller identified sinful behavior rooted in low self-esteem rather than in an inherent rebellious aspect of human nature.[2] J. I. Snyder criticized this argument on the basis that: (1) the assumption that sin is caused makes it reasonable and understandable, (2) it undercuts God's judgment against sin, and (3) it gives

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[1]Holifield, History, 18-22.

[2]Schuller, Self-Esteem, 67.

rise to a tolerant attitude toward sin.[1] He maintained that sin must be understood ultimately as an impenetrable mystery (i.e., irrational in character).[2] A distorted self-image is a result of the fall but should not be identified as the root cause of the sin problem. Schuller's redefinition of sin led him to reinterpret the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Jesus as "self-esteem building compliments."[3] In this way he emptied the concept of sin of any elements that might be offensive to the human self. The end product of this approach is an explanation of salvation in terms of a psychological restoration of self-esteem.[4]

It seems that Schuller's approach basically reduced the biblical concept of sin to the category of a psychological problem (low self-esteem). A more adequate approach to the issue allows the biblical concept of sin to stand on its own. William Dyrness, in his study of OT theology, noted a dual sense of sin;

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[1]J. I. Snyder, "Correlates and Causes," Theology Today 42 (January 1986): 499-503.

[2]Ibid., 502.

[3]Schuller, Self-Esteem, 100.

[4]It seems that the title of Schuller's book, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation, indicates the self-conscious nature of his program. He recognized the essence of the old reformation as focusing on God's glory at the expense of human glory. And his program is an attempt to posit human glory as the central loci of Christian faith.

a personal, voluntary deviation from normal standards and a state of guilt with the liability for punishment.[1] Jones and Butman offered a similar conception of sin as both "acts that violate moral standards" and "a state of being, nature, or disposition."[2] Theologically, sin is located within human nature and manifests itself in acts of transgression and disobedience (Mark 7:20-23; 1 John 3:4).

The idea of sin as a state of being is generally identified as "original sin." This concept conveys the idea of the universality of sin[3], and the existence of an underlying motivational structure within the self. Pannenberg explained the structural aspect of original sin:

> The will's bondage, which leaves intact the power to choose, that is, the formal act of self-transcendence, but reduced its range, points to a motivational structure that precedes and underlies individual decisions and actions, as being the source of failure in regard to the self (emphasis supplied).[4]

In this understanding, original sin is an inner "motivational structure" which precedes decision and

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[1]Dyrness, Themes, 106-107.

[2]Jones and Butman, Modern Pscyhotherapies, 51.

[3]W. O. Amy and J. B. Recob, Human Nature in the Christian Tradition (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1982), 38.

[4]Pannenberg, Anthropology, 119.

behavior.[1] This view of sin is similar to psychoanalytic and behavioristic views of human nature. Bernard Spilka identified psychoanalytic and behaviorist views with the notion that the human will is the product of libidinal and cultural determinism.[2] The idea of "original sin," instead of libidinal and cultural determinism, appears to represent a type of intrapsychic determinism. This notion underscores the radical nature of sin and the absolute necessity of divine intervention for salvation.

This conception of sin is definitely problematic to self-esteem. In actuality it views the human self as predestined to failure because of an internal motivational structure. This is certainly not the foundation of a healthy sense of self-esteem. In a certain sense this view tends toward the negation of the self. R. H. Rottschafer identified a tendency in Christian theological contexts to define the self in terms of an "image of passivity and submission."[3]

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[1]Pannenberg identifies "original sin" as one of two alternatives regarding an understanding of sin; innate sinfulness (original sin) and the reduction of all sin to the actions of individuals. Pannenberg, Anthropology, 131.

[2]Bernard Spilka, "Images of Man and Dimensions of Personal Religion," 73.

[3]R. H. Rottschafer, "Grace and the Importance of the Self," The Journal of Psychology and Christianity 7 (1988): 6.

This image appears to be rooted to a large degree in the concept of original sin. In contexts in which original sin is emphasized, the self is usually completely rejected as a basis for self-esteem.[1]

This one-sided emphasis on original sin and the negative aspect of human nature does not adequately represent the totality of theological anthropology. Pelagius (fourth century B.C.), in writing against the notion of original sin, observed that this teaching tended to make God look unjust in commanding the impossible and then condemning people for what they cannot avoid.[2] In contrast to this position he maintained the goodness of human nature with special emphasis on the concept of free will.[3] Pelagius, commenting on free will, insisted that "the dignity of our nature consists entirely in this."[4] This

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[1]The self is often totally denied as a source of self-esteem. "The believer may never be satisfied with himself or herself." Hoekema, God's Image, 111.

[2]Pelagius. "Letter to Demetrius," in Theological Anthropology, trans. and edited by J. Patout Burns, Sources of Early Christian Thought, series ed. W. G. Rusch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 53.

[3]Ibid., 42-50.

[4]Ibid., 42.

essential anthropological insight must not be overlooked.[1]

It is not the purpose here to solve the problem of "original sin" and "free will." The polarity of these positions indicates the complexity of the issue. However, it seems that a theological anthropology must maintain these views in tension. James and Butman underscored this tension:

> A Christian understanding of sin that is truly biblical must maintain a balance between seeing sin as a violation of law and as a violation of relationship, of sin as individual and sin as corporate, of sin as being driven by rebellion and sin as driven by anxiety, of sin as something we are in bondage to and are yet responsible for (emphasis supplied).[2]

While not diminishing the power and impact of sin in the human sphere, it is important to maintain the self as a responsible agent with limited freedom.[3] It is true that in certain respects the self is powerless and in bondage. However, it is equally true that in other respects the self is an active and responsible agent of decision and action.[4]

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[1]James Arminius also emphasized human freedom in the context of partial depravity and prevenient grace. W. H. Baker, In the Image of God (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 93-113.

[2]Jones and Butman, Modern Psychotherapies, 52.

[3]Ibid., 47.

[4]Ellen White indicates that there are spheres of activity and passivity for the self. The self is passive in regard to atonement for sins, the change of

The view of the self as both passive and active, in bondage to sin and yet maintaining freedom provides a more adequate basis for anthropocentric self-esteem than the view of a totally passive and negated self. Bernard Spilka in an article on functional and dysfunctional religion enumerated one basic component of functional religion:

> Psychologically, the most desirable situation may exist when the person attributes constructive activity to both the self and God.[1]

In some respects this conception of selfhood represents a shift away from passivity to activity and from control to freedom.[2] The benefit of such a conception is two-fold. It appears to be a needed emphasis in light of Christian images of depravity and passivity. In contrast to this totally negative view, the self is conceived in such a way as to provide an adequate basis for the anthropocentric self-esteem factors. Furthermore, it contributes to self-esteem in that it identifies sin as an anti-human phenomenon.

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heart, and the generation of holiness. The self is active in regard to the confession of sin, the giving of the self to God, the will to serve God, and belief in the word of God. White, Steps to Christ, 51.

[1]Bernard Spilka, "Functional and Dysfunctional Roles of Religion: An Attributional Approach," The Journal of Psychology and Christianity 7 (1988): 5-15.

[2]Spilka, "Images of Man," 71.

This thought is expressed by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> We know that man is made for the stars, created for the everlasting, born for eternity. We know that man is crowned with glory and honor, and so long as he lives on the low level he will be frustrated, disillusioned, and bewildered.[1]

Barth expressed a similar concept theologically in a treatise dealing with true humanity:

> To be in sin, in godlessness, is a mode of being contrary to our humanity.[2]

These ideas convey the theological conception of sin as a distortion of genuine human being. For this reason, anthropocentric self-esteem can only be rooted in that which is truly and genuinely human. The concept of sin qualifies the self-esteem factor in that it locates that within the self which is not worthy of self-esteem.

Summary and Conclusion

Modern thought tends to understand reality using an anthropocentric methodology. This approach begins with the phenomenon of human being and reasons from this center to explain all other reality. In many instances this approach ends in the reduction of Christianity into humanistic categories. The attempt to integrate psychology and theology has resulted in a

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[1]Martin Luther King, Jr., The Measure of a Man (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 26.

[2]Green, Barth, 231.

similar phenomenon. In many instances Christian themes are interpreted in the light of psychological concepts of the self. The problem with this approach is that it reduces theology into psychological categories. On the other hand, conservative Christians tend to deemphasize the self and prefer a God-centered methodology. The problem with this extreme theocentric approach is that it tends toward the negation of the self. An anthropologically conditioned theocentrism appears to represent a more reasonable approach. In this perspective, God and the human self are active agents in the formation of self-esteem.

The self is a complex phenomenon that eludes precise conceptualization. It has exercised the minds of philosophers and theologians from ancient times. This has resulted in a variety of conceptualizations and terminology used to elucidate the meaning of self. However, this diversity does not exclude a basic understanding of self. It seems that common to most conceptualizations of self is the idea of that which is most central to human being.

The Bible does not provide a delineation of the self using precise anthropological categories. However, its message is preeminently concerned with that which is central to human being. The equation of biblical anthropological terms with self has provided a

means by which Scripture can address issues related to the self. In general, the theological view of the self is two-fold. Self refers to that which is human and to that which is sinful in humans. In this perspective the self is a complex composite of good and evil.

The relevant loci of a theological anthropology for self-esteem are the concepts of the imago dei and sin. The good that is within the self (imago dei) is understood as the basis for a sense of self-esteem. This anthropocentric basis for self-esteem is not complete, however, because of the distortion of the image through sin. Self-esteem should correspond to the presence of the imago dei, but because this image is qualified by sin, self-esteem will never be ultimate or complete in an anthropocentric context.

The final chapter will deal with the theological loci which compliment and complete the anthropocentric basis for self-esteem. Specific dimensions of theology, christology, and soteriology are understood as significant sources of self-esteem for the Christian.

CHAPTER 3

THE TRINITARIAN FOUNDATION OF SELF-ESTEEM

Introduction

In the previous chapter the anthropocentric factors relevant to the self-esteem variable were discussed. It was seen that a Christian theological view of the self must not undercut human factors in an attempt to establish a theocentric basis for self-esteem. It was seen that in an anthropological context, self-esteem is derived from the imago dei in human nature but qualified by the presence of sin.

The anthropocentric basis of self-esteem is not, however, a sufficient basis for self-esteem. The psychological language of self-esteem attributes too much credit to the human and is not oriented to the centrality of God. Self-esteem can never be adequately conceived of apart from God because the self does not exist apart from God. Human being alone is not intrinsically and ontologically sufficient as a basis for self-valuing. Human value, worth, and dignity proceed from God and are directly attributable to him. To look in humanity for that which is sufficient to

satisfy completely the self-esteem need is to look in the wrong place. The experience of Adam and Eve is illustrative. Had Adam and Eve never fallen, humanity in itself would still not be a sufficient foundation for self-esteem. Even their perfect selves were not the source of that in which they were satisfied and content. That which they were in themselves was in itself the work of another, namely God.

The purpose of the present chapter is to identify and explain the theocentric factors in the formation of self-esteem. These factors provide a trinitarian foundation for self-esteem. This means that the self-esteem variable will be analyzed in relation to the doctrines of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The meaning and significance of self-esteem will be explained in the context of these foundational doctrines.

It should be underscored that self-esteem is not the same in a Christian context as it is in a psychological context.[1] The trinitarian foundation necessarily modifies the concept. The trinitarian

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[1]The tendency of modern pastoral theology is to allow psychological concepts to shape theological understandings. However, this methodology should be rejected as it leads to the distortion of the Christian message. For a full discussion of this issue, see, Holifield, A History of Pastoral Care.

foundation represents the unique contribution of the Christian faith to the formation of self-esteem.

Self-Esteem and God-Image

The relationship between self-esteem and the concept of God is quite interesting. Benson and Spilka examined this relationship in a fascinating study. They reached the conclusion that the lowering of self-esteem corresponds to the development of negative views of the world, others, and images of God.[1] In Benson and Spilka's view, low self-esteem corresponded to punitive concepts about God. The conclusion appears to be fairly well established. A similar concept which appears to support this hypothesis is Fromm's idea of the conjunctive nature of self-love.[2] Fromm's view maintains that love for others is directly proportionate to love for self. A decrease in self-love leads to a decrease in other-love. A genuine self-love is prerequisite for a geniune love for others. The relation of self-esteem to the image of God and self-love to other-love appear to follow the pattern of a relationship between self-attitudes and

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[1]Peter Benson and Bernard Spilka, "God Image as a Function of Self-Esteem," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 13 (1973): 297-310.

[2]For a complete exposition of this view see, Fromm, The Art of Loving.

attitudes in general.[1] The idea is that attitudes toward the self are determinative of attitudes in general.

The self-esteem variable can be a controlling factor in the person's concept of God. It is interesting that this relationship has only been studied in the context of low self-esteem. There does not appear to be any research indicating the possible conditioning effects of high self-esteem on the concept of God. This is probably due to the almost universal assumption that high self-esteem is a desirable level of self-valuing. However, this does not mean that such effects do not exist. Browning made a significant statement about God which is apparently conditioned by the assumption of the human need for high self-esteem:

> The God who affirms us and who enters into our lives with unconditioned empathic acceptance does not rob us of our autonomy or stifle our growth toward maturity. . . . Instead, this is the God who constitutes the ground of all advance into responsible autonomy by being an invariant source of affirmation and love (emphasis supplied).[2]

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[1]Ellen White appeared to recognize the corresponding relationship between attitudes toward the self and others. She said, "Through indulgence in sin, self-respect is destroyed; and when that is gone, respect for others is lessened; we think that others are as unrighteous as we are ourselves." Ellen White, Mind, Character, and Personality, 1:256.

[2]Don S. Browning, Atonement and Psychotherapy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 259.

The problem with this image of God is that it is conditioned by two unproven psychological assumptions. First, that high self-esteem is a healthy and desirable level of self-valuing. Second, that the psychotherapeutic context provides the best model for a relationship of "unconditioned empathic acceptance" which satisfies the self-esteem need. As such it empties the concept of God of any elements regarding wrath toward sin or displeasure toward sinners.

The conditioning effect of self-esteem on the conception of God should not be overemphasized. The image of God may also have a corresponding effect on the self-esteem variable. That is, a person who perceives God as threatening and harsh may experience more guilt and thus lower self-esteem.

The Doctrine of God

Self-esteem is related to the doctrine of God in a variety of ways. The facets of these various relationships will be dealt with in the following sections.

God as Transcendent Being

The very existence of God as a transcendent and infinite being has implications for self-esteem. In this perspective, self-esteem is not derived exclusively from interpersonal and intrapsychic

sources. There is more to reality than the existence of the human. Therefore, the ground of human worth is not contained within the sphere of observable phenomenon. Browning has expressed this idea clearly:

> It has been my contention that this inner datum of experiencing oneself as an object of primary value cannot be reducible to the totality of interpersonal sources of positive regard and empathy. Instead, it is the consistent witness of life that there is a source of human affirmation which transcends and constitutes the ground of all its specific and interpersonal origins (emphasis supplied).[1]

This means that the human factors in the formation of self-esteem are only a part of the total picture. For this reason, the materialistic and humanistic worldview, although distinguishing human from animal and attributing high value to the human, cannot morally and logically establish a complete basis for human worth.[2] However, the doctrine of God does provides a stable foundation for self-esteem. The reason for this is that behind all human sources in the formation of self-esteem is a God who is infinite, omnipotent, and personally involved with the human being.

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[1]Ibid., 261-262.

[2]William M. Counts, "The Nature of Man and the Christian's Self-Esteem," Journal of Psychology and Theology 1 (1973): 39.

God's Value System

A major process in the development of self-esteem is the comparison of the "ideal" and the "perceived" self.[1] The ideal self is an "internalization of values transmitted by significant others and the culture."[2] The value system thus formed is used to evaluate the perceived self. Internalized social values often create an uncertainty about self-value because the self has only relative value, based on relative social norms.[3] The standards by which human worth is derived are culturally and socially conditioned.

The doctrine of God provides a source of self-value apart from these relative social norms. In such a context self-esteem is not ultimately bound to particular cultural, social, or personal standards but is above all related to God and conditioned by his evaluation of human worth. In fact, it is the genius of Christianity that value is attributed to each individual apart from any social reference group.[4]

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[1]Ellison, Your Better Self, 3.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Gerd Theissen, Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology, trans. John P. Calvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 37.

[4]Ibid., 38.

This means that human standards are not the ultimate criterion of self-esteem.

Modern industrial cultures tend to measure worth in terms of superiority and success while denigrating such human qualities as limitation, weakness, inadequacy, and ordinariness.[1] This often leads to a synthetic (manufactured) self-esteem in those unable to measure up to such high standards of achievement in actual experience.[2] In contrast to the modern value system is the value system derived from the doctrine of God. The system thus derived is the ultimate criterion for the measurement of self-esteem. As a system it is a great asset in the formation of self-esteem. E. L. Johnson expressed the idea in the following way:

> God values the weak. The Scriptures record his delight in choosing the weak, the foolish, and the base of this world (1 Cor 1). God reverses the values of the world.[3]

Following this reasoning self-esteem is possible even for the average and below-average individual. Superior traits, talents, and achievements are not prerequisite to a healthy sense of self-esteem.

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[1]V. M. Bilotta, "Pride: An Obstacle Along the Formative Journey," Studies in Formative Spirituality 4 (1983): 315, 318.

[2]Ibid., 321.

[3]Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," 233.

The idea that God values the weak and sinful is extremely important in the context of modernity and self-esteem. Modern society tends to value the strong and superior while devaluing the weak. A value system based on superiority undercuts the self-esteem needs of the lower classes. In the context of Christianity such a value system is reversed in order to provide an alternative source of self-value for those who are not at the top of the social, moral, or intellectual ladder. Nietzsche expressed this great reversal in commenting on the work of the Church:

> To reverse all estimates of value. . . . And to shatter the strong, to spoil great hopes, to cast suspicion on the delight in beauty, to break down everything autonomous, manly, conquering, and imperious--all instincts which are natural to the highest and most successful type of "man" (emphasis supplied).[1]

Although extreme in nature, Nietzsche's primary idea is significant for the formation of self-esteem. The fact that God values the weak and sinful underscores the fact that self-esteem is a gift of

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[1]Nietzsche made this statement in the context of his understanding that in catering to the sick and suffering Christianity was contributing to the deterioration of the European race. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990), 70. The psychologist Abraham Maslow appeared to be influenced by Nietzsche when he wrote, "Especially must we learn how to transcend our foolish tendency to let our compassion for the weak generate hatred for the strong." Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, 40.

God's grace. It is not given only to the wise, strong, and powerful but to all human beings regardless of attributes or achievement. In this way it is understood that self-esteem is not gauged by social, cultural, and intellectual indicators but primarily by the fact that a gracious God exists and that he values all human persons.

The Person as Creature

Inherent in the doctrine of God is the distinction between the Creator and the creature. This is a fundamental tenet of Christian belief which lies at the very heart of monotheistic religion. There is only one God who is the Creator of the universe. All other beings are created by him and subservient to him.

The emphasis on God as Creator is very significant in the formation of self-esteem. The simple story of Creation has profound implications for self-valuing. W. M. Counts explained the significance in the following way:

> The biblical view of creation is that in every way man is a planned, purposeful, significant, valuable creature.[1]

Thus, apart from any consideration of the human condition or experience, the account of the origin of

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[1]W. M. Counts, "The Nature of Man and the Christian's Self-Esteem," Journal of Psychology and Theology 1 (1973): 41.

the species is reason for self-esteem. The experience of self-esteem stems not from achievement but from grace. In other words, God made the human species; the cognitive and affective components of self-esteem stem from this event. Apart from individual attributes and achievements lies a ground of self-value based on the person and work of a transcendent God.[1]

Viewing humanity in its rightful place is the key to understanding this idea correctly. The recognition of creatureliness is a great step in the direction of viewing humanity correctly. The image of the human as a created being reflects reality more than other images.

The idea of God as creator impacts self-esteem in another way. Ernst Kasemann, reflecting on the human being as creature, concluded that "man cannot be defined from within his own limits."[2] This means that as a creature it is impossible for human being to be defined apart from reference to God. However, the discipline of psychology attempts to define the self in purely humanistic categories without reference to God. In this way self-esteem takes on a different

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[1]The idea of self-esteem apart from interpersonal and intrapersonal factors is not unique. Deigh identified class and cultural attributions of worth in which human value is "fixed independently of one's conduct." Deigh, "Shame and Self-Esteem," 241.

[2]Kasemann, Perspectives, 31.

significance than in the Christian context. The difference is best understood in terms of the place of self-esteem in the overall system of understanding. E. L. Johnson identified this significant difference in the following way:

> When the self begins to compete with God as the end for which we live and as our ultimate value, self-esteem becomes a central concern.[1]

In the Christian view self-esteem is significant but not supreme, important but not paramount. The basic distinction between God as Creator and human as creature undercuts the psychological tendency to make self-esteem the determinative factor for human development.

The idea of the human as creature also fosters a healthy sense of limitation and dependence which is essential to self-esteem. In a modern technological culture which tends toward overachievement this is a needed emphasis. Bilotta analyzed the modern tendency:

> In our culture we strive to be the best, better than, top dog, superior, to outdo and outshine others. Winning and competition inflates and exalts our image of ourselves. In our culture our ordinary actual selves are not valued. Competing to win success becomes a way to become more than who we actually are. Our culture fosters the striving to develop an unreal vision of who we are (emphasis supplied).[2]

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[1]Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," 231.

[2]Bilotta, "Pride," 318.

The high value on superiority and success linked with the need for self-esteem naturally leads to the tendency to overestimate oneself. This tendency to overestimate is particularly strong in high-esteem individuals and is often identified with egocentricity and narcissism. The doctrine of creation can reduce this tendency in that the emphasis is on the finite and dependent nature of human personhood. This view undercuts the extreme achievement demands of the modern context. The individual is able to maintain self-esteem in the face of limitation and deficiency. This is because the factors relevant in the formation of self-esteem are not exclusively in the human sphere.

The ultimate ground of self-esteem is the creator God and his work of creation. As a creature, the human being derives cognitive and affective satisfaction from a source outside the framework of experience. This means that apart from any limitation, deficiency, or weakness, the human being is able to maintain a sense of self-esteem. Thus, the doctrine of God is an integral part of the trinitarian foundation of self-esteem.

The Doctrine of Christ

The second component of the trinitarian foundation of self-esteem is the doctrine of Christ. Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Godhead and

the Savior of humanity, is crucial to the self-valuing process. As with the doctrine of God, self-esteem is derived from the doctrine of Christ by an understanding of his person and his work. The teaching related to Jesus Christ, when accepted in the context of a realistic worldview, is a significant source of self-esteem.

The centrality and priority of the person of Jesus Christ in the context of Christian faith is almost universally recognized. The salvific process is generally understood as the realization of a relationship with Christ. The impact of this notion on self-esteem is noteworthy. Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon expressed the dynamics of that process in the following terms:

> The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not no longer concern him (emphasis supplied).[1]

The significance of this analysis lies in the identification of the shift "from self to Christ." In this view, self-esteem is no longer derived primarily from direct self-relevant factors. The focus has shifted from the self towards Jesus Christ. For the

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[1]This represents the common understanding of the dynamics of the salvation process by most conservative Christian groups. Dave Hunt and T. A. McMahon, The Seduction of Christianity (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985), 202.

Christian, Jesus is central in the self-valuing process.

The person of Christ impacts the self-esteem variable in another significant way. This is related to the priority given to his work as the savior of humanity. Ellen White explained the reason for the priority given to Jesus in the plan of salvation:

> In vain are men's dreams of progress, in vain all efforts for the uplifting of humanity, if they neglect the one source of hope and help for the fallen race (emphasis supplied).[1]

In this context, the development of a healthy sense of self-esteem is impossible apart from the salvific work of Jesus Christ.[2] The psychological endeavor to develop self-esteem is not completely sufficient. However, the priority given to Christ does not necessitate the rejection of psychological insights into the formation of self-esteem. These insights are placed within the context of the Christian worldview and related to the salvific process.

The doctrine relating to Jesus Christ provides a christological basis for self-esteem in a trinitarian framework. This means that the human person derives

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[1]Ellen White, Steps to Christ, 21.

[2]Ellen White understood the development of self-esteem (self-respect) as a part of the work of Jesus Christ in the restoration of fallen humanity. Ellen White, Mind, Character, and Personality, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1977), 28.

value from the person and work of Jesus Christ apart from any internal anthropological factors. The value and worth of every human person is thus established outside of the context of human experience.

Incarnation

The teaching regarding Christ's incarnation impacts on the self-esteem variable in a variety of interesting ways. The incarnation provides a theological foundation for the emphasis on the human person.[1] The idea here is that human value is not a secondary but rather a primary concern in the context of Christian belief. Human concerns and needs are not trivial but important. Through the incarnation, human need is connected with divine sufficiency. In this way the incarnation justifies the endeavor to satisfy the self-esteem need. Self-esteem is fulfilled not in a way of the human beings' own choosing but through the action of God to fulfill a legitimate human need.

The incarnation also impacts self-esteem in that it establishes the unique importance of humanity in the universal order. Karl Barth expressed this idea

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[1]Pannenberg, Anthropology, 12.

in a treatise on Christ's humanity:

> It is only in the human and not in any other creaturely sphere that the creaturely correspondence, image and representation of the uniqueness and transcendence of God has been actualized as an event (emphasis supplied).[1]

This unique embodiment of God in the human sphere marks the human person as a creature of immeasurable worth and value.[2] The impact of this idea on self-esteem is significant. The human person derives value from a source and an event which is unrepeatable and unchangeable (i.e., the incarnation).

Understood in this way, the incarnation establishes the value of every individual apart from any anthropological factors. Barth explained the effect of the incarnation on all humanity:

> A decision has been made concerning the being and nature of every person by the mere fact that among all other people he [Jesus] too has been a human being. No matter who or what or where they may be, they cannot alter the fact that this One is also human. And because this One is also human, all people in their places and times are changed, i. e., they are something other than they would have been if this One had not been human too (emphasis supplied).[3]

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[1]Green, Barth, 233-234.

[2]Cullmann considered the worth of the individual person as the chief distinguishing mark of the Christian proclamation in contrast to Judaism. See Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 217.

[3]Green, Barth, 228.

The humanity of the one man Jesus Christ raises the value of every human being. The fact that Jesus was born into the human race elevates the value of every individual in that race. The value of the individual is thus established on the basis of that which cannot be altered. The contemplation of this unchangeable reality instills a sense of self-esteem which is not subject to fluctuating social norms or personal inadequacies and lapses in self-functioning.

The incarnation of Christ impacts on the self-esteem variable in yet another way. The incarnation sets the standard of evaluation for that which is truly human. It is only in the person of Jesus Christ that an understanding of what it means to be genuinely human is possible.[1] This means that the attributes and achievements which comprise the foundation for self-esteem are embodied in the person of Christ.

Cross

The work of Christ on the cross is central in the formation of self-esteem. As the doctrines of creation and incarnation establish human value on an unchangeable foundation, so does the cross. It

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[1]Barth expressed this concept in terms of the revelation of humanity through a confrontation with the revelation of the divine likeness in Christ. See, Green, Barth, 233-234.

provides a "new ground of worth" for the human being.[1] Ellen White expressed the idea in the following manner:

> It is through the cross alone that we can estimate the worth of the human soul. . . . The worth of man is known only by going to Calvary. In the mystery of the cross of Christ we can place an estimate upon man (emphasis supplied).[2]

The cross establishes the value of the human being apart from its attributes and achievements. The significance is that the self-esteem variable is related to the work of Christ on our behalf. Self-esteem is not, in an ultimate sense, rooted in anthropocentric factors, but finds a basis in the work of Jesus Christ. Since Christ died for the entire human family, the cross establishes the value of every individual apart from personal and cultural considerations.

The Christian teaching on justification by faith is significant in this context. The impact of this doctrine on self-esteem is two-fold. First, justification by faith provides a way to deal with sins and deficiencies which inhibit a healthy sense of self-esteem. This process is traditionally understood in terms of Christ bearing human sins vicariously on the cross. The substitutionary nature of the sacrifice

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[1]Browning, Atonement, 262.

[2]Ellen White, Testimonies, 2:634-635.

provides the remediation of a damaging self-punitive cognitive-emotive state. Gerd Theissen expressed the psychological impact of this teaching:

> The cognitive restructuring of the self-image takes place through changed causal attribution of sin. Sin is attributed to the flesh and to the one who vicariously took on flesh.[1]

The attribution of personal sin and deficiency to Jesus Christ releases the individual from the damaging effects of sustained negative self-attributions.

Second, justification by faith impacts self-esteem in that it provides a context for positive self-attributions. This idea is traditionally expressed in terms of the imputation of righteousness.[2] The attributes and achievements of Christ are credited to the individual and provide a new ground of self-evaluation.

Justification by faith opposes the strong achievement orientation of psychological perspectives relating to self-esteem enhancement. Human accomplishment, in the Christian view, is not the ultimate foundation for self-valuing. Martin Luther

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[1]Theissen, 264-265.

[2]Ellen White, Steps to Christ, 63.

explained the significance of achievement in the Christian life:

> The works of a believer are like this. Through his faith he has been restored to Paradise and created anew, has no need of works that he may become or be righteous . . . but that . . . he may provide for and keep his body, he must do such works freely only to please God.[1]

The idea is that human achievement is not the root but the fruit of the salvific experience. Human works are not the determinative source of self-evaluation for a believer in Christ. The achievements of Christ replace the achievements of the self as the ultimate reference point for self-esteem.

New Humanity

The idea of the new humanity is intimately related to the teachings regarding the cross and justification by faith. In the New Testament, the old humanity, represented by Adam, is contrasted with the new humanity which is represented by Jesus Christ (Rom 5). It is the saving action of God in Jesus Christ which establishes this new creation.[2] Theissen

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[1]John Dillenberger, ed. Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1969), 69.

[2]Werner G. Kummel, Man in the New Testament, revised ed., trans. John J. Vincent (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 95.

explained the significance of this understanding for self-esteem:

> We need no longer understand ourselves according to the role of Adam but can rather orient ourselves on the role of Christ and judge and assess ourselves anew in its light (emphasis supplied).[1]

The role of Christ as the head of a new creation is thus determinative for the self-esteem variable.

In this context, the Christian understanding of faith significantly impacts on self-esteem. Participation in the new humanity is through faith. Thus, it is through faith that the individual exchanges the role of Adam for the role of Christ. Martin Luther expressed a concept of faith that has tremendous implications for self-evaluation:

> The third incomparable benefit of faith is that it unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. . . . Accordingly the believing soul can boast of and glory in whatever Christ has as though it were its own . . . . If he gives her his body and self, how shall he not give her all that he is? (emphasis supplied).[2]

In this view, faith enables a self-attribution of all that Jesus Christ is and does.[3] The definition

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[1]Theissen, Pauline Theology, 264-265.

[2]John Dillenberger, Martin Luther, 60.

[3]Cullmann referred to this complete identification in the following terms. "One can even say that the main points of the second article of the later creed are here (referring to Col 3:1-4) connected with the life of the individual: with Christ he dies, with Christ he rises, with the Christ who sits at the

of the self by faith in relation to the role of Christ contrasts with the definition of self by attributes or achievements. Self-esteem is derived not from the experienced self but from a personal identification with Christ by faith. This means that apart from any internal and interpersonal factors lies an unchanging source of positive self-valuing, namely the perfect self of Christ.

The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the third component in the trinitarian foundation of self-esteem. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead and, as such, is a crucial part of the trinitarian grounding of self-esteem. The work of the Holy Spirit relates particularly to the anthropocentric factors in the formation of self-esteem.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit impacts self-esteem in two significant ways. First, the Spirit convicts the believer of sin which reduces the anthropocentric basis of self-esteem. This means that the work of the Spirit in the conviction of sin may result in a decrease of self-esteem according to the anthropocentric basis of self-valuing. Second, the

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right hand of God he makes his home "above." With Christ he takes part in the present hidden state of glory upon earth. Cullmann, Christ and Time, 218.

Holy Spirit restores the personality into the image of God. This means that the Spirit's work will increase self-esteem through the restoration of positive self-attributes and achievements.

The significance of the Holy Spirit's two-fold work lies in its congruence with the present human condition. The human condition, even after conversion, is a paradox. The self is a complex composite of good and evil which requires a double attitude consisting of self-acceptance and self-denial.[1] These ideas will be elaborated in the sections that follow.

Process of Sanctification

The work of the Holy Spirit is generally referred to as sanctification. Sanctification is the process by which the believer is restored into the image of Christ (Col 3:10). Conviction of sin is an indispensable part of this process from its conception to completion. Restoration is accomplished as the human agent turns away from self-generated efforts of renewal and toward the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works within the life of the individual to restore the sin-damaged character to its originally intended state of perfection.

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[1]See Stott, Cross, 278-284.

Present Human Condition

In the context of the Holy Spirit's work, the present condition of the believer in Christ is important. This is a complicated matter, and the issues will not be settled here. Following is a brief treatment of the basic tension in the Christian life. As such it is not intended to solve the issues but only to suggest the significance of the tension of the present human condition on self-esteem.

The classic expression of the tension regarding the Christian experience is simul justus et peccator.[1] The concept involves an understanding of the Christian as simultaneously righteous and sinful. The logical contradiction of this understanding is overpowering, and yet Scripture (Isa 64:6; Rom 3:10-12; 6:11, 12; 8:3-11; 6) and Christian experience support it. Hoekema emphasized the impact of this teaching on self-esteem:

> In Christ we are now justified sinners, sinners who have the Holy Spirit dwelling within, sinners who are being progressively renewed. Our way of looking at ourselves must not deny this newness but affirm it (emphasis supplied).[2]

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[1]This is a Latin phrase meaning "simultaneously righteous and a sinner," attributed to Martin Luther (1483-1546). For more on this concept see, Bernard M. G. Reardon, Religious Thought in the Reformation (New York: Longman House, 1981), 59, 125, 228.

[2]Hoekema, Christian Looks at Himself, 55.

In this perspective, self-esteem is derived completely from the view of the self based on the declaration of full righteousness in Christ. However, this seems to ignore the simultaneous declaration of complete sinfulness. It would seem more consistent to view self-esteem as derived from both perspectives captured in simul justus et peccator. This understanding forms the basis of the divergent yet simultaneous attitudes of self-denial and self-acceptance.

Another important way the basic tension in the Christian experience is understood is through the idea of the "already" and the "not yet." Cullmann offered the classic expression of this conception:

> In Christ we already have redemption from the power of sin ; this means that now as never before we must battle against sin. This apparently contradictory joining of imperative and indicative is nothing else than the application to ethics of the complexity . . . of the present situation in redemptive history. We are dealing with the working out of what we have called the "tension between the already fulfilled and the not yet fulfilled." (emphasis supplied)[1]

This conception is significant in the context of self-esteem. Hoekema explained the impact of this

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[1]Cullmann, Christ and Time, 225.

teaching on the self-esteem variable:

> We are in Christ, to be sure, and therefore we share in His decisive victory over the powers of evil. But, since we are still on this side of His Second Coming, we do not yet enjoy the totality of Christ's victory. Our self-image must leave room for eschatology--for the fact that we are not yet what we shall be.[1]

In this view, the present condition of the human self is never an adequate basis for a totally positive self-evaluation. The future condition of the self is also important in the formation of self-esteem.[2] The following sections relate the work of the Holy Spirit to the simultaneously existing attitudes of self-denial and self-acceptance.

Conviction of Sin

The Holy Spirit operates in the life of the individual in order to bring about a conviction of personal sinfulness (John 16:8). Theissen commented on

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[1]Hoekema, Christian Looks at Himself, 72.

[2]Deigh mentioned the possibility of the person identifying, "for the purpose of self-assessment, with the person he will become." Deigh, "Shame," 227; Ellen White expressed a similar concept in the the context of a helping relationship with another person. "Our advancing ideas of what he may become are a help we cannot ourselves fully appreciate." Ellen White, Mind, Character, and Personality, 1:255.

the psychological aspects of this process:

> There remains within the individual an obscure region that, just like the behavior of one's fellows, remains withdrawn from the individual's judicial competence. And this too is an humane characteristic: the human being is not God. One is not fully transparent to oneself. Even when one, as homo religiosus, has experienced an enormous expansion of consciousness with regard to oneself and others, even when the "Spirit of God" has been conferred on one, even then, yes, precisely then, does one become conscious that this does not exhaust matters (emphasis supplied).[1]

The Holy Spirit will constantly be bringing to conscious awareness hidden aspects of the person to be evaluated by the "individual's judicial competence." This means that the cognitive structure on which self-esteem is based is constantly changing. As negative aspects of the personality are disclosed by the Holy Spirit, self-esteem is bound to be affected. The negative disclosures regarding the self produce feelings of low self-esteem. In this perspective, low self-esteem undergirds the experience of repentance. Repentance is a cognitive-affective response of self-denial toward the negatively disclosed aspects of the self.

Restoration of the Image of God

The work of the Holy Spirit involves restoring the human person in the image of God. This restoration

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[1]Theissen, 106.

provides a stronger anthropocentric basis for self-esteem. Clark commented on this process:

> Our truest selves are enhanced and enriched when tendencies to egocentricity are overcome by the Spirit's power. Then we make progress toward our full potential as real humans--we become like Christ (emphasis supplied).[1]

This means that as positive attributes and achievements are more fully realized in the individual, corresponding self-accepting attitudes will develop simultaneously.

It is important to realize that the process of sanctification is a progressive transformation. This means that it is never complete on this side of the Second Coming. Larry Crabb developed the thesis that on this side of heaven the human condition is imperfect and therefore subject to pain and frustration.[2] The significance of this view is that self-esteem is not completely fulfilled in an anthropocentric context until the final glorification. At the resurrection and glorification, the human self will be fully and completely perfect and free from sin. Therefore, the internal basis for self-esteem will be fully established. The self-attitudes will be consistently

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[1]Clark, "Biblical Words for the Self," 317.

[2]Larry Crabb, Inside Out (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), see esp. the introduction.

positive because there will be no sin or imperfection to qualify the experience.

Summary and Conclusion

The doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit comprise the trinitarian foundation of self-esteem. This represents the unique contribution of Christian belief relating to the self-esteem variable.

In the field of psychology self-esteem is based entirely on anthropocentric factors. In a Christian context, these factors are important but do not constitute the entire ground for self-esteem. The doctrines relating to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit provide the theocentric factors relevant in the formation of self-esteem.

The doctrines relating to the trinity impact on the self-esteem in a variety of ways. However, the most significant contribution of these teachings is that they provide alternative sources of self-valuing. This means that apart from the attributes and achievements of the self is a transcendent source of self-esteem. Thus for the Christian, personal, social, and cultural expectations are not the only determinative forces in the formation of self-esteem. Apart from all human considerations is a God who establishes human value on the basis of divine attributes and achievements.

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